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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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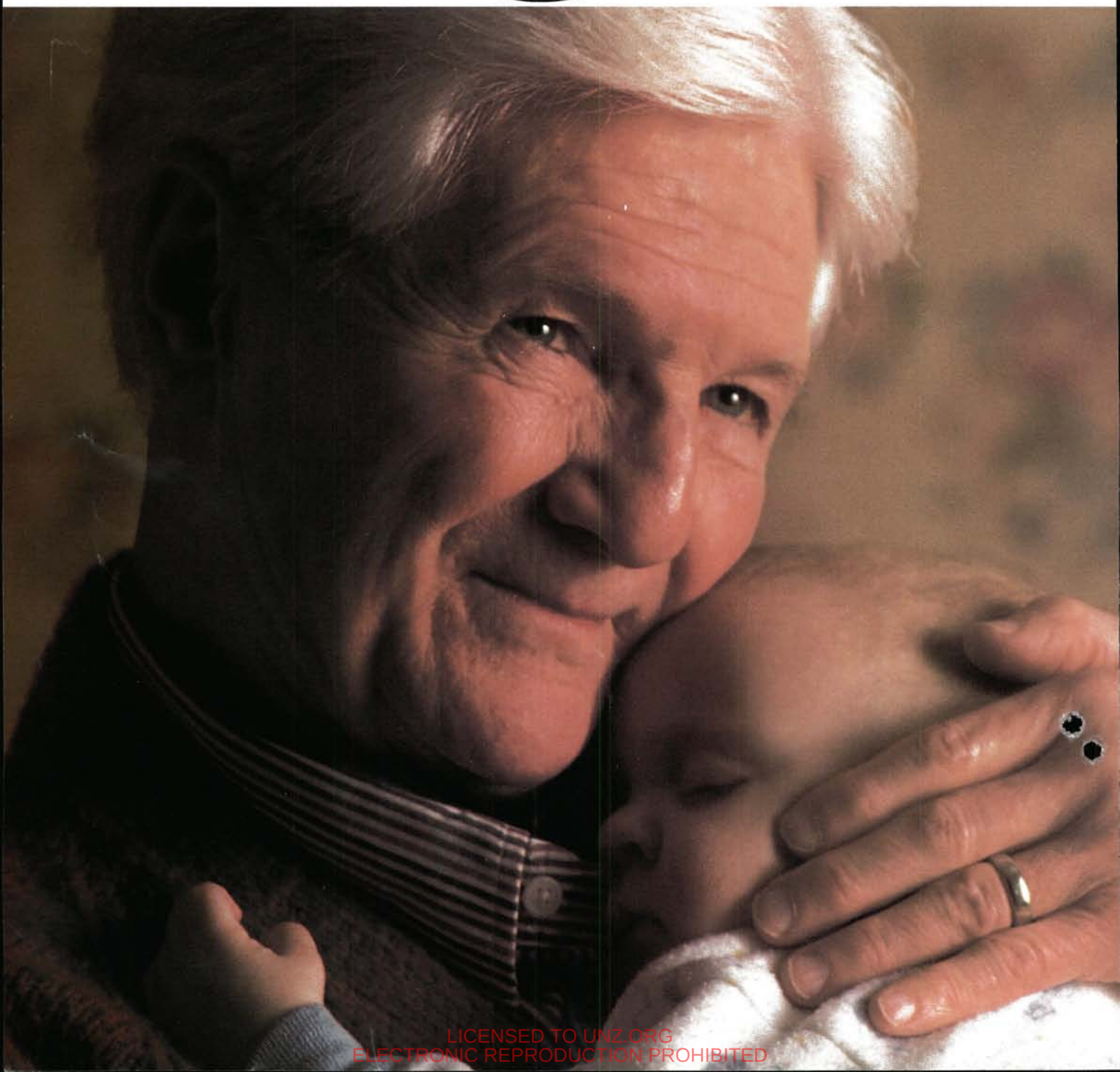

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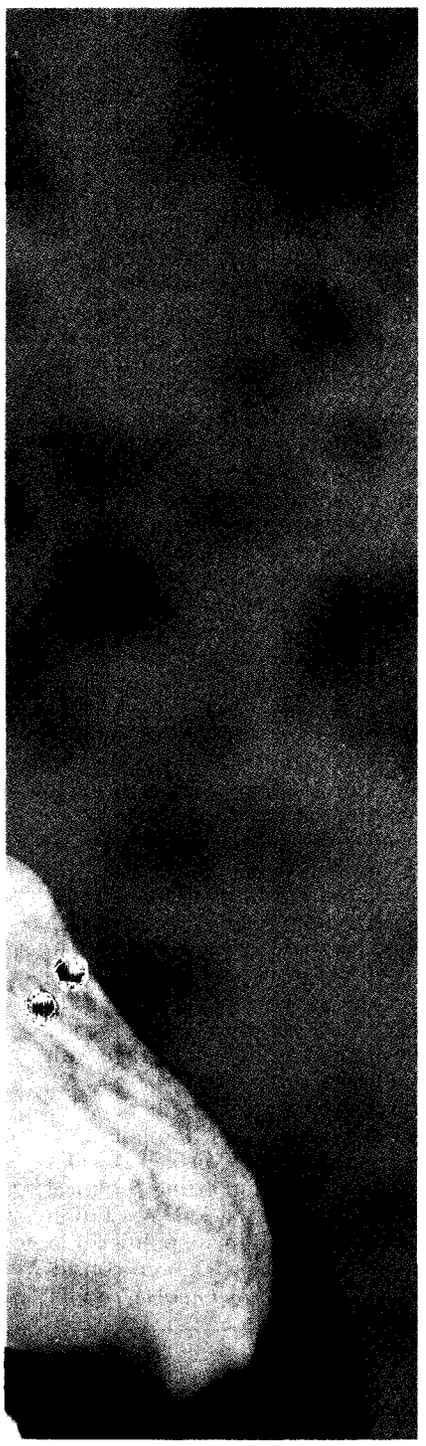

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FROM WASHINGTON

He'll do

Many Democrats, perhaps, have been thinking the way I have about our party's presidential nomination. For many months my position was: I'm for Clinton—just don't tell me anything about him. More recently my position has been: Goddammit, I *told* you not to tell me anything about him.

According to *Doonesbury* and others, Bill Clinton in person emits some magic scent that causes strong journalists to swoon. This may be true. But for most Democrats (including me) who've never met the man, his appeal is different. For Democrats, the Age of Romance is over. We're not looking to swoon. All we want now is a good provider who'll be kind to the children. The usual rap on the Democrats—that militants who dominate the nominating process inevitably will produce an unelectable extremist—was always enemy agitprop (Dukakis was no left-winger), but never so absurd as this year. We want a winner.

For Republicans as well, true romance is not in the cards this year. George Bush is not a man to swoon over—he's a man to keep the enemy from the door. For loyalists of both parties, though, the trouble with the politics of lowered expectations is that whenever you think you've lowered them enough, you've got to lower them again.

The other day I called my guru Charlie Peters, editor of *The Washington Monthly* and a Southerner, to get the party line. What do we think of Clinton now? "Ah cain't decide, Ah cain't decide," said Charlie in some agony: "Is he too much of a liar?" That is exactly the right question in the spirit of 1992. Of course he's a liar. They're all liars. But is he *too much* of a liar?

Clearly he's too much of a liar for his own good, and when he's not lying he's a reflexive weaseler. Even many supporters are pretty sure he's lying about Gennifer Flowers, which is odd considering his artful honesty on the general question of adultery. His "never broke the laws of my country" evasion about marijuana was doubly pointless: first, because youthful dope smoking is a proven non-issue; and second, because it was inevitable he'd be cornered.

Nevertheless—to answer the question posed on TNR's cover a couple of weeks ago—he'll do.

The notion that the press has given Bill Clinton a free ride is preposterous. About the only thing people know or think they know, about him is that he has "character" problems. Not one in twenty people who are under this vague impression has weighed the details of the various charges to determine whether they are valid. And not one in fifty could tell you what Clinton's economic program is. Unless you think Clinton is patently disqualified and should have been driven from the race, it's hard to see how the press coverage has tilted things in his favor.

Now New Yorkers—preening themselves on their hard-nosed skepticism—may be about to prove that they can see through Slick Willie by awarding an upset to the 1992 campaign's most obvious fraud, the Unspeakable Jerry Brown. Brown is hustling these supposedly street-smart voters like a three-card monte operator hustling tourists on Fifth Avenue. For cryin' out loud, folks, how long you been in this town?

Clinton's "scandals" need to be put in perspective—in particular the perspective of his competitors, especially George Bush. So he played golf at an all-white country club. Has anybody gone back to check the many places where our golf-mad president has teed off over the years? No one seriously supposes that Clinton is a racist. Indeed, his speeches demonstrate a passion about race relations that George Bush can't even fake. And Jerry Brown can't either.

Similarly, whatever you make of Hillary Clinton's law practice, no one seriously supposes that the Clintons are financially corrupt. Their ambitions so clearly lie elsewhere. Meanwhile, not only have George Bush's family members openly exploited their relationship for profit, but—as Pat Buchanan used to point out before he went into semi-retirement—Bush's very campaign team is stocked with people who have made fortunes by selling their influence with his administration.

Clinton even gets it these days for being too ambitious and "too political." You really cannot win. Michael Dukakis was savaged for not being political enough, not fighting back. Now Clinton is criticized as the ultimate politician in an anti-politician year. It's even consid-

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Washington D.C.'s Chef of the Year 1990
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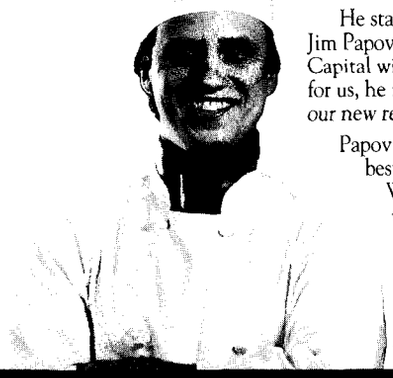

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CORRESPONDENCE

Mythrepresentation

To the editors:

Andrew Hacker's piece on "The Myths of Racial Division" (March 23) is loaded with misleading statistics and burdened by a number of irrelevant and therefore obfuscating observations. Why, Hacker asks, "should race be the crucial variable" in the way we think about the disintegration of American families, more specifically, about "the increases in nonmarital births and female-headed households"? The fact is, he argues, "low income and education outweigh race in causing family instability." Moreover, there are "social trends" to which all races and classes are subject, and "Census figures" show that over the last four decades "both black and white families have disintegrated at virtually identical rates." In 1950, we learn, "17.2 percent of black families were headed by single women, against 5.3 percent of white families.... In 1990, the figures are 56.2 percent and 17.3 percent respectively.... Plainly, what we have been seeing are not so much race-based differences as concurrent adaptations to common cultural conditions."

Now, it doesn't take much in the way of statistical sophistication to understand that the use of "rates" to think about the differences between black and white American families over the last forty years is thoroughly misleading. When we state the facts of the case without reference to rates, we see at once how dire are the differences Hacker largely dismisses with his vague resort to "social trends." Fact: since 1950 an additional 40 black families out of every 100 have become single-parent families. In that time only an additional 12 out of every 100 white families have gone in that direction. To speak of "virtually identical rates" of disintegration is to ignore the essential fact that black communities are in a state of crisis having much to do with these family patterns and that white communities are adapting much better to changes in family models caused principally, though not solely, by the women's movement.

Beyond this, there are other obviously relevant facts that Hacker does not call into play as he compares rates of disintegration. For example, Census figures will not tell him what proportion of black female-headed households are routinely visited by, or in touch with, fathers who also provide some financial assistance, or what the proportions are in comparable white families. But many studies indicate that there are enormous differences between black and white families in this respect especially, and though Hacker is perhaps right to reject the word "pathology" to describe what has happened in the black family, he can't begin to make sense of the crisis to which writers like Cornel West and Shelby Steele have called our attention without moving beyond the statistical straitjacket he has assigned himself.

Of course, Hacker's motives are admirable. He wants to show that there is nothing about being black that in and of itself inclines people to commit crimes or to father illegitimate babies. But few of those inclined to read books like Hacker's *Two Nations* will believe that blacks commit crimes because they are black. Many of them, however, will find absurd Hacker's attempt to establish equivalence by citing "the ubiquity of absent fathers—black and white" when he knows full well that there is no such ubiquity, and that the very word "absent" means one thing when fathers are unknown to or distant from their children and altogether another when they maintain regular contact with them. Hacker contends that it is wrong "to call on black Americans to show greater discipline" when it is not they alone who have "deviated from national norms." But of course the impact of illegitimacy and crime has been much greater in the black community than among whites, and though "discipline" alone can be a misleading and empty injunction, there seems little doubt that human beings can sometimes benefit by being called to their responsibilities.

Hacker also reminds us that, in the past, when many white Americans were poor, and black institutions like the Southern churches exerted considerable influence upon their congregations, the prison rolls were largely occupied by whites. Today, he says, as whites increasingly belong to the middle class, they have less reason to commit violent, face-to-face crimes, and so prisons are largely populated by blacks.

At best, this argument stresses what we ought anyhow to know, namely, that crime and poverty are often closely related. And of course it reminds those who need reminding that there is no such thing as criminal tendencies belonging to one race that do not also belong to every other. But it is a way from there to effectively addressing the sense held by large numbers of perfectly humane and reasonable people that "blacks are far more likely to commit crimes than whites." Hacker means to counter this impression by stating that, whatever the available statistics on violent crime and larceny may suggest, white people also sometimes commit serious crimes and would commit even more if they were less influenced by "class constraints" to "repress hatred or rage." But even if Hacker is right about reasons and probabilities, and even if we go so far as to contend that the scoundrels who gave us the recent S&L debacle are fully as disgusting specimens of humanity as any street criminal, we are yet forced to acknowledge the fact that in many large black communities today ordinary black citizens are afraid for their lives and their children and are about as apt as any nervous white bourgeois to be wary of young black men roaming the streets or hanging out in apartment house corridors. It is not racism or provinciality that prompts the impression that blacks are more likely to commit violent crimes than whites.

Until we accept that there is good reason for ordinary black and white citizens to be afraid of crime, and to expect that it will more likely be visited upon them by black than by white criminals, we'll not be prepared to address real problems in a serious way. Hacker's motives appear to be humane, but his wrong-headed, sometimes half-hearted attempt to establish equivalences where there are none may encourage readers to suppose that only racists would stress the extraordinary incidence of violent crime in the black community. In addition, Hacker's resorting to glib psychosocial formulations ("Class constraints are also more likely to make whites repress hatred or rage") inclines him to overlook obvious facts, such as the fact that most black people do not need those class restraints—whatever they may be—to get on with decent, if also difficult, lives having no more to do with hatred or rage than the more affluent lives of most white Americans.

ROBERT BOYERS
Saratoga Springs, New York

The writer is editor of *Salmagundi*.

To the editors:

In some of his previous works, Andrew Hacker appeared concerned by the increasing scope of ethnic preferences in higher education. In "The Myths of Racial Division," he is now rationalizing and underestimating reverse discrimination against white males. This apparent conversion is regrettable. Hacker condescendingly talks of white males' "feelings" about reverse discrimination and ignores the mounting evidence that such feelings mirror realities.

Instead of focusing upon preferential policies at a few elite colleges, Hacker might have examined recent evidence of widespread "race-norming" of employment and promotional exams, which necessarily injured millions of less-than-

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Ivy League whites. Hacker belittles blue-collar whites who aspire to police or firefighter careers ("though not usually studious, they cram hard for the tests" and only those who score "at the margin" blame affirmative action for failure). Instead, Hacker might have sifted through the dozens of available cases where minority status all but obliterated much higher achievements of whites on objective criteria. (For example, in the 1989 *Martin* v. *Wilks* Supreme Court case, one of the white firefighter-plaintiffs who ranked sixth on the promotion list, with an exam score of 192 and numerous other training credentials, was passed over in favor of a black ranked eighty-fifth on the list with an exam score of 122 and no other fire-related credentials.)

Hacker holds that it was OK for Alan Bakke to "feel injured," while again ignoring evidence of embarrassingly large differences between Bakke's academic achievements and those of minorities admitted to the U.C. Davis Medical School. (U.C. Berkeley Professor Vincent Sarich discovered a gap of similar magnitude in undergraduate admissions at that school: whites and Asians have average SAT scores some 210 points above those of blacks and Hispanics.)

Like the policies they defend, Hacker and other apologists discount important variations such as class, age, subcultures, etc. They also seem unaware of the powerful, spoils-system forces set loose by preferential formulas—as in the 30 percent minority hiring "goals" enshrined in the new legislative mandate for the California Community College system—a document that also dictates that faculty ethnic representation must mirror that of the entire state by 2005. Proliferating plans like this one indicate that older justifications of affirmative action as a means to atone for past wrongs are now merging with "forward-looking" preference formulas to "get right with the future." That is, institutions should use ethnic criteria to recruit and promote in anticipation of projected increases in ethnic diversity.

FREDERICK R. LYNCH
Claremont, California

The writer is associate professor of government at Claremont McKenna College.

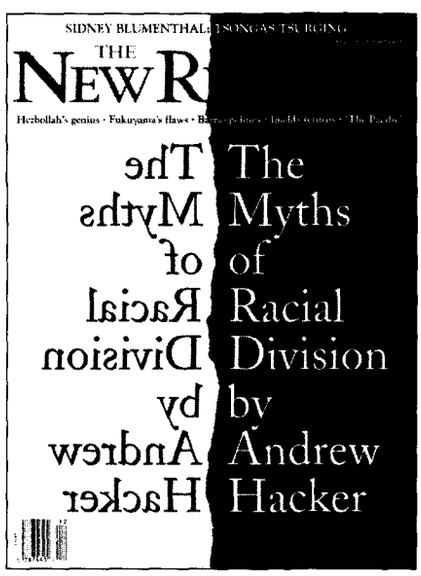
Black and green

To the editors:

In "Black and Green" (March 2) Matthew Rees had a point to make, and he was determined to make it, despite the facts with which I and others supplied him.

First, he asserts that "the only study" to discuss the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color was the 1987 United Church of Christ study, and concludes that "classism," not racism, may be the reason for this disparate impact. Rees may be interested to learn that Paul Mohai and Bunyan Bryant, professors at the University of Michigan, have analyzed the *fifteen* empirical studies completed on the topic since 1971, including two by the U.S. government, and found that twelve concluded that distribution of environmental dangers was inequitable by income, while eleven concluded that the distribution was inequitable by race. Further, of the eight studies that looked at race *and* class, five found that race was more important than class in predicting disproportionate impact.

Rees says that a suit we recently won



on behalf of residents of Kettleman City, California, both "undermines the cause" and was "race-baiting" because we charged Chemical Waste Management with environmental racism. ChemWaste, which places its toxic waste incinerators solely in neighborhoods where people of color live—the South Side of Chicago, 75 percent black; Sauget, Illinois, 72 percent black; and Port Arthur, Texas, 78 percent black and Latino—is now trying to place their fourth incinerator in Kettleman City, 95 percent Latino. People in that community understandably see such a siting pattern as racist.

Rees also states that the people of Kettleman City, "disregarding the aid of mainstream groups such as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund," turned to the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation for help. But the people of Kettleman City actively sought the participation of several mainstream groups in the litigation we ended up bringing, and none of them, including the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council, would take the case.

LUKE W. COLE
San Francisco, California

The writer is an attorney with the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation.

Aesthetic activism

To the editors:

The postman rang only once, but he delivered Alex Ross's "The Ghosts of the Met" (March 9) on the same day that he brought the March *Commentary* with Samuel Lipman's "'Ghosts' and American Opera." Great minds must have been thinking alike, as the two pieces made essentially the same points about contemporary opera, John Corigliano, and Corigliano's recent world premiere at the Metropolitan, *The Ghosts of Versailles.*

Presumably these writers normally come at things from differing perspectives, but both also have trouble fitting Corigliano's *Symphony No. 1* (the so-called AIDS symphony) into their assaults on the composer's oeuvre. Ross ignores Corigliano's explicit statements—including those in the program notes for both the recording (which he neglects to mention is by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) and concert performances—that this work was inspired by the NAMES Project Quilt. Whatever Ross may think of Corigliano's "eclecticism" and "backward-glancing approach" in his other compositions, such criticism of a work of memories, and particularly of memories of specific musicians who have died during the epidemic, seems misplaced at best.

Ross salutes Corigliano for being open about his gayness, but he does so in a left-handed way, immediately after he has stated his real beef with the symphony's incorrectness: Corigliano did not write a piece that saluted the AIDS crisis as the cradle of "a new form of political and aesthetic activism." Given the complete silence on AIDS from other serious composers—and from nearly all popular music writers and artists as well—must we be so harsh in judging a man who was the first among them to take on this scourge and who would turn to his memories as a means of expressing his rage and despair?

ANDREW PATNER
Chicago, Illinois

The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be held to under 200 words. Letters may be edited for space. Please address letters to: Correspondence, TNR, 1220 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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The Pros and Cons of Privatization

BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

There are people who consider privatization—getting private companies to take over providing public services—to be a panacea. They look at the poor performance of our public schools, for example, and say that privatization would solve this problem. The "discipline of the market" would make "inefficient" public schools disappear because people would cease to patronize them. Children could go instead to the excellent and cost-efficient private schools that would spring up in response to public demand. This is a dazzling vision. The trouble is, there's no evidence that privatizing education would make it a reality.

In "Does Privatization Serve the Public Interest?" (*Harvard Business Review*, November-December, 1991), John B. Goodman and Gary W. Loveman look at the pros and cons of privatization. They don't talk specifically about education, so they don't look at some of the important questions about private school choice, the currently popular plan for privatizing education—for instance, whether we want to spend taxpayers' money sending children to religious and other private schools. But a lot of what they say is relevant to claims that privatization will allow us to educate students better—and for less money.

Goodman and Loveman conclude that privatization is no magic bullet. It can suffer from the same problems as the public-sector institutions it replaces—poor service, high price, even bureaucratic paralysis and corruption. In fact, they say, the big question is the same whether a service is provided by a public or private agency: Is there a mechanism that makes the company accountable, that forces it to provide what the public wants and needs?

The big question is the same whether a service is provided by a public or private agency.

They describe a number of situations where privatization achieved exactly what supporters say it will. In Chicago, for example, when the public towing operation was unable to keep up with the number of abandoned cars on the city streets, the city government contracted out the service to a private company. The company not only got rid of the cars; it also paid the city $25 for every car it removed—thus adding $1.2 million to the city treasury. And in Phoenix, Arizona, competition from the private sector got public garbage collectors to figure out how to do their job better and more cheaply. They were so successful, in fact, that they won back the contracts they'd lost to private outfits. In these cases, defining goals and determining whether they were being met was relatively easy. But establishing accountability can be just as tricky in the private sector as it is in the public sector.

Goodman and Loveman discuss a study that cites programs set up under the Job Partnership Training Act (JPTA) as an example of privatization working badly. If you just looked at the numbers, JPTA seemed like a huge success: "Two-thirds of the adult trainees found jobs and over 60 percent of youth trainees had positive experiences." But the numbers were apparently very misleading. The government had taken no part in establishing or monitoring standards, so the private companies carrying out the work were free to set admission standards—they could pick applicants who would be easy to place and reject the rest. They could also decide how long a person had to work at a job for the placement to be considered successful.

Of course, in a situation like this, the government could decide what constitutes good performance and make sure the private contractor measured up—for instance by linking compensation to performance. If it doesn't, a private company may have no more incentive to figure out the best way to do a job than a government agency. Perhaps it will have less: Doing the job well will not increase profits and may cut them.

The applicability to education is obvious. The point of privatizing education would be to improve its quality. People who support privatization assure us this would happen. But monitoring educational improvement is not like figuring out whether a private company has actually towed away cars. And no one who talks about giving kids taxpayers' money to go to religious and other private schools mentions admission and performance standards set and monitored by the government.

The supporters of privatization assume that private schools will be removed from public scrutiny—as they always have been—and that they will accept whom they want and set their own standards for success. If success means getting into college, why, anybody who wants to—and has the money—can do that now. So that's no test of educational improvement. Neither is parental satisfaction. As Gallup polls have told us, year after year, parents may be critical of schools in general, but they are usually satisfied with schools their own children attend.

And as we already know from experiments with choice in Minnesota, a better academic program is seldom at the top of the list when parents choose a school.

If taxpayers simply want to let parents send their kids to religious and other private schools at public expense, privatizing education is the perfect vehicle. If they are worried about the performance of our students and want to improve the quality of public education, there is nothing about privatizing education, per se, that will achieve this. Unless, that is, the government sets standards for these schools and mechanisms to hold them accountable. There is no sign that the government would consider doing this or that religious and other private schools would stand for it. On the other hand, there's no reason why the government shouldn't do it for public schools.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

APRIL 20, 1992

THE OUTSIDERS

The prospect of a Democratic victory next fall is matched only by the paucity of fit candidates with which to achieve it.

This sentence began our editorial of April 16, 1924, on the possible maverick candidacy of one John W. Davis, a lawyer without any political experience. The editorial was titled, "Why Mr. Davis Shouldn't Run." Not for the first time or the last, our advice was ignored. Not only did he run, he secured the nomination. Which is to say, the lure of the outsider in American politics is recurrent and profound, and it is usually inhospitable to rational debate. Wendell Willkie, a former Democrat and anti-TVA utilities executive, was the Republican aspirant in 1940. In 1952 General Eisenhower was courted by the Democrats, but finally anointed and exploited by moderate Republicans—their last hurrah. In 1980 John Anderson (whom we endorsed) also garnered some anti-political as well as anti-Carter support. They all lost.

This year the figures of Jerry Brown and H. Ross Perot present themselves as the latest incarnations of this American archetype. Both would be disastrous presidents. With Perot we have a temptingly apposite foil for George Bush: a real Texan on horseback. No one in the race thus far encompasses more than Perot does one still powerful and mythic expression of the American dream: that you can rise from nowhere to riches through hard work. This is a dream that, with his own trust funds and indifference to those without them, Bush has helped extinguish. But Perot is no genuine answer to Bushism. No one knows what he believes in, except impatience and efficiency and the exertion of will, which are admirable features of personality but dangers when promoted to moral and political values. His strength is his affect, his pretense that he is a "can-do" man. But "do" what exactly? When pressed, Perot utters platitudes—America as a town hall, government as a corporation—that amount to isolationism in foreign affairs (he was against the Gulf war) and corporatism in economics. Perot's rise—the desperate response of voters who rightly balk at the smooth-edged duplicity of both party establishments—is a symptom of our sick polity, not a cure for it.

Jerry Brown is a rather more complicated offense. For a start, he is a fake even as an outsider, the ultimate symbol of the corrupt politics he now claims to oppose, a consummately ambitious, narcissistic, and cynical politician, the sort of "insurgent" that makes you wonder if Marcuse had a point. Brown has been twice elected governor of California (not through the brambles like other pols, but thanks to his father, also governor of the state), and it's been downhill ever since, except that his ambitions are ever upward. He has already lost twice in his bid for the presidential nomination and, after way stations in Calcutta and other exotic locales, did a completely conventional and completely dismal job as chairman of the California state party. That was when he tried and failed to raise big bucks, and so decided to make a virtue of his failure and fixed on the morally elevating restriction of limiting contributions to $100. (The gaping difference between a moral crusade at $100 and the end of civilization at $1,000 escapes us.) But even with $1,000 contributions he couldn't get off the dime in his campaign to win one of the California Democratic nominations for the two U.S. Senate seats open this year.

No one in our politics has been more sure of his own virtue and of the venality of others. Yet the candidate now running against the alleged slickness of his opponent has repeatedly repackaged himself beyond recognition, and is now the ventriloquist's dummy of campaign consultants. His answer to charges of hypocrisy is the response of the televangelist: prime-time repentance and repetition of the 800 number. If in the process of his political penance Brown has highlighted some worthy ideas—simpler, more neutral taxation—that is not a reason for supporting him. It is merely a reason for rescuing those ideas from his cynical clutches.

Jerry Brown's real achievement is to have broken new ground in demagoguery. He has retained its form and discarded its content. Demagogues are dangerous because of the intensity with which they believe one thing. Brown is a demagogue who has intensely believed in everything. He is that rare creature, an insincere demagogue. And the blithe way in which many primary voters are prepared to overlook his opportunistic combination of goofiness and hauteur, rancor and saintliness, spinelessness and righteousness, is genuinely alarming. It represents not a genuine attempt to rescue politics from its current maladies, but a deeper rejection of politics altogether. Brown is the candidate of democracy's escapists. •

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On January 14, 1992 we opened a billion dollar plant in the heart of Detroit. Some say that's stupid.

We say it's responsible.

Our Jefferson North plant is a commitment to the quality of the product and the community.

We could have taken the easy way out, like a lot of companies are doing these days. We could have built our plant in a field outside a small town to keep operating costs down.

Instead, on January 14th we opened one of America's most advanced auto plants in the heart of Detroit. We're keeping thousands of jobs where they're needed most, in the inner city. And providing millions in taxes.

Jefferson is going to show the rest of the industry how to produce world-class quality, and improve the quality of community life. For us, it's a good feeling. For the consumer, it's a good product.

Environmentally, it's one of the cleanest plants in the world.

We think the new Jefferson plant will set new standards of environmental responsibility. We're using breakthrough technology to reduce the amount of waste materials in the earth and air.

Rather than having the overspray from painting cars end up in a landfill, at Jefferson the paint overspray will be collected, recycled and can be used as underbody paint.

We'll save more than 50,000 tons of scrap every year by using returnable shipping containers with foam padding instead of wooden crates and cardboard.

We're using recyclable containers to transport liquids. Not the old 55-gallon steel drums.

Storage tanks for gas, oil and solvents are above ground to prevent contamination of water supplies. And the tanks are placed within concrete barriers.

Our own on-site water treatment facility cleans up 500,000 gallons of plant process water daily.

Chrysler technology isn't just for the cars we build. It's for where we build them.

Jefferson will be as efficient as any import operation in Tennessee or Timbuktu.

We're operating Jefferson on a lean production system. And that means lean in every step of the manufacturing process.

Our people function as a team, not as specialists working separately. Everybody together from the start, solving problems to avoid downtime later on. It makes sense and it saves dollars.

We have 206 robots at Jefferson, doing everything from welding body panels to applying the

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finish paint coat. That sounds like a lot of automation. But compared to most plants, it isn't. We're using just enough of the best technology to build the best quality.

Parts delivery has been revolutionized. Instead of one central delivery point, trucks can pull up to 56 unloading docks placed around the plant. The assembly line is routed to pass by a truck bay when a part is required. Need an engine loaded into a vehicle? The engine will be there when the line rolls around.

American plants usually have several days of parts inventory stacked up. At Jefferson, we want to keep the parts inventory down to eight hours.

Minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency to improve quality. That's the whole idea behind Jefferson.

The most advanced technology, and the safest way to use it.

We believe we have not only the best production equipment at Jefferson, but also the safest working environment.

Management and union safety representatives were involved in the design and building of every work station in the plant. Safety features such as light screens and pressure-sensitive mats have been built into the manufacturing processes. Even the heights of the conveyors were carefully considered.

The goal at Jefferson was to set new standards of worker safety for the whole industry. We think we've done it.

The Jefferson difference: 2,100 experienced pros with almost a million hours of training.

The work force at Jefferson has more car building experience than any other in America, maybe the world. The average length of service for all employees is 26 years. These are the people who played a major part in turning this company around. They know what it takes to build quality.

But with all those years behind them, they still received over 900,000 hours of training. The new machinery in place at Jefferson isn't new to them.

You can buy technology. You can't buy experience, loyalty and pride. Those are the real ingredients of quality.

We built a whole new plant to keep a legend alive: Jeep® Grand Cherokee.

One brand sums up what four-wheel drive is all about: Jeep.® To the industry, it's a sport utility vehicle. To the world, it's a legend.

When you build a legend, you never change it unless you can improve it. The technology and experience at Jefferson will produce the highest quality Jeep® ever: Jeep® Grand Cherokee.

Grand Cherokee is the best-looking, roomiest, most comfortable Jeep® we've ever turned out. The engine is a 4-liter Power Tech Inline 6-cylinder, the most powerful and fuel efficient in its class. Ride and handling are better than ever. Anti-lock brakes are standard. Even an air bag is standard. And like every Jeep,® it goes anywhere.

A lot of people love the Jeep® mystique, but still want the feel of the family car. For them, Jeep® Grand Cherokee is the answer. And we'll build plenty to go around–720 a day when Jefferson is at full capacity.

In a bad economy, Jefferson is good news. For the city, for Chrysler, for the country.

Pick up any newspaper any day and all you read are discouraging words. About the economy in general, and the car business in particular.

Perhaps the prophets of doom should take a hard look at what Chrysler is doing. We're opening a plant, not closing one. We're breathing life into an inner city, not letting one die. We're supporting American workers and what they can produce, not giving up the quality race to Japan or Germany.

In the car business you lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Lee Iacocca

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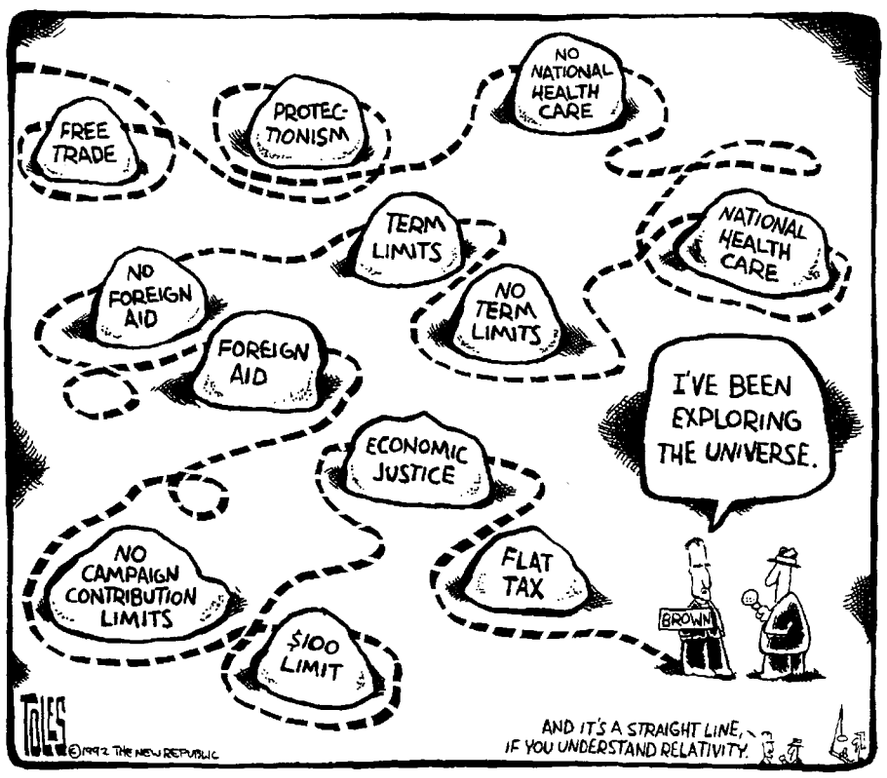
NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK: "Hey, hey, nihaoma. Hey, yeah, yeah. Heil, heil—a kind of Hitler salute." —March 29, greeting tourists at Lafayette Park on his way home from church ("Nihaoma" is Cantonese for "How are you?")

JERRY'S CODE: Last Monday Jerry Brown stood outside the New York Stock Exchange and railed, in language that most American Jews would instantly recognize, that he would "drive the moneylenders out of the temple." Pressing his bid to reform campaign financing, Brown waved a recent copy of *Business Week*, which listed Bill Clinton's "friends on Wall Street": Roger Altman, Roy Furman, Arthur Liman, Alan Patricof, Robert Rubin, Stanley Shuman, Michael Steinhardt, and Bruce Wasserstein. We understood that Brown had taken lessons from every political consultant he could find, but we weren't aware until now that some of them were probably moonlighting from Pat Buchanan's campaign.



APRIL SURPRISE: Readers of TNR will know why we're mystified by PBS's decision to air a second "Frontline" documentary (at a cost of $300,000) further hyping the October Surprise conspiracy. We haven't seen the program yet—but it's produced by Robert Parry, who is more accurately described as an active proponent of the theory than an objective reporter. Another producer is David Marks, who arranged a movie deal in 1989 with Gary Sick and Richard Brenneke, a key October Surprise source, based on the conspiracy. And we do know some of the reporting methods employed by Parry and Marks. Take the case of Peggy Robohm, a writer and researcher who was once a strong believer in the theory. In 1990 Robohm agreed to co-author Brenneke's life story. After scrutinizing thousands of pages of personal records and tapes of Brenneke's own secretly recorded telephone conversations, she discovered that he had fabricated the story. Frank Snepp subsequently wrote a devastating article in the *Village Voice*, based on Robohm's records, detailing the hoax. Soon after it appeared, Robohm was called by Marks, who told her he was a "newly hired investigator" with the congressional committee "looking into the October Surprise from the Senate side." Marks demanded access to Brenneke's records. When Robohm balked, Marks said he had "ways of getting it anyway." Only at the end of the conversation did he reveal that he was actually working on a documentary about the October Surprise. Then Parry asked Robohm to let him film the Brenneke documents, which showed that Brenneke never even left the United States in October 1980, when he claimed he was in Paris. Robohm agreed, but after learning of Parry's bias, she refused to sign an appearance release form for the documetary, as requested by "Frontline"'s Robert Ross. Another "Frontline" producer sent Robohm a letter saying he would not accept Robohm's "revocation ... [of her] consent." Robohm, who had been promised a job on another "Frontline" research project, was then informed by another PBS reporter, Scott Malone, that she wouldn't get the assignment after all unless she consented to appear in the October Surprise documentary. If these tactics are any measure of the program's quality, taxpayers should demand a refund. "Investigating the October Surprise" is scheduled to air April 7 on PBS.

FRANKLY SPEAKING: To frank or not to frank? That was an easy question for members of Congress facing the end of fiscal year 1991 with money left in the postage pot. Rather than forfeit the difference, they went into a franking frenzy. Over a third of members spent more in the last quarter of the year than in the three previous quarters combined, according to the National Taxpayers Union. Nearly a quarter of House postage spending occurred in the last three weeks of the year. That's some Christmas

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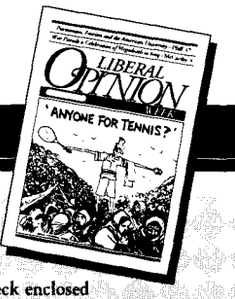

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mailing list. We hope the congresspersons have a less profligate new year.

YOU CAN BREATHE OUT NOW, BILL: "When I was in England, I experimented with marijuana a time or two, and I didn't like it, and I didn't inhale, and I never tried it again." —Bill Clinton, uttering his least believable campaign statement to date

THE RECISSION: Bush has long demanded a line-item veto in the name of fiscal restraint. But a quick look at his "recission" package of proposed budget cuts makes you wonder what he'd do with real line-item veto power. Of the sixty-eight items Bush identified as wasteful spending, only two—public housing and the Seawolf submarine—amount to substantial sums. The rest, ranging from $100,000 for a biomass demonstration project to a $20 million environmental research center not requested by the EPA, certainly represent examples of congressional excess, but add up to piddling amounts. Even including the two big-money items (which are not clear examples of government waste), the total package adds up to a paltry $4 billion—about 1 percent of this year's deficit.

WELCOME WAGON: Years ago THE NEW REPUBLIC ran regular political cartoons. We're delighted to say that, starting with this issue, we'll be reviving the tradition. Tom Toles, of *The Buffalo News*, whose incisive work is widely syndicated, will be contributing regularly to our Notebook section with a cartoon exclusively for TNR. •

Jerry Brown's only good idea.

FLAT CHANCE

By Alan Reynolds

Jerry Brown is not the first ex-governor from California to be dismissed as having flaky ideas about taxes, although he would presumably not be flattered by the precedent. Mindful of it, perhaps, Bill Clinton is currently blasting Brown's plans for a flat tax as a "war on New York." But the idea of a flat tax should be taken more seriously than the Clinton campaign appears to be taking it, for both political and economic reasons. And in New York, where deceptively inflated incomes expose many couples to unmerciful taxes, it could even prove a vote-winner.

The idea of a flat tax is nothing new. It was first proposed in the late 1950s in *The Uneasy Case for Progressive Taxes* by Walter Blum and Henry Kalven, promoted by Milton Friedman, and carefully developed by economists Robert Hall and Alvin Rabushka into an exceedingly simple tax return that could fit on a postcard. The basic idea is to minimize the tax rate by eliminating as many loopholes as possible. The low marginal tax is designed to encourage effort and investment, while the flat rate eliminates much complexity and ambiguity.

The greatest ideological anxiety about a flat tax is that it would not, by itself, redistribute money from those who have some to those who don't. But this is only half true. Under a flat tax, if Smith earns five times as much as Jones, Smith still pays five times as much in taxes. What he doesn't do is pay *proportionately* more. The flat tax, in other words, is not, strictly speaking, regressive. (A regressive tax would be a lump sum, such as Margaret Thatcher's dreaded poll tax.) A flat tax just isn't actively progressive.

In any case, it's becoming increasingly clear that progressive taxes have little or no lasting effect in redistributing income. As Jeff Faux and others have shown, changes in income distribution over the past decade or two have been almost entirely confined to before-tax income, with taxes having almost nothing to do with it. The forces now at work in the international economy that favor greater income inequality are far stronger than almost any progressive system of taxation in a free country could effectively cancel out, as recent American history shows. Around the world, the only effective progressive government policy seems to be not progressive taxation, but government spending on the poor. A 1985 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development of all major economies concluded that "the evidence for almost all countries suggests that the tax system overall has relatively minor effects on the income distribution."

Even many economists who favor a progressive income tax concede that it doesn't actually encourage economic growth. If it doesn't redistribute income effectively either, why not move over to a flat tax, which gives up on income redistribution but provides far greater incentives for wealth creation? The low, flat marginal tax encourages productive effort and investment since people get to keep a larger share of any added income, though average tax burdens are unchanged. A flat rate is also relatively neutral. People will not often make inefficient plans simply to avoid being pushed from, say, a 15 percent to a 28 percent tax bracket. A flat tax for all economic activities—for savings, investments, and spending—also allows market forces to determine the most efficient allocation of resources. A flat tax with few deductions could entail discarding numerous infuriating tax forms, saving both taxpayers and the IRS much time and grief trying to figure out who owes what. And the simplicity of administering a flat tax helps keep government accountable, by mak-

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ing the true cost of government quite clear to the taxpayers.

Although the general appeal of a simple flat tax is clear enough, reasonable people can and do differ about how to go about it. Brown proposes a flat 13 percent income tax with few deductions and a 13 percent value-added tax (VAT) with none. He would completely do away with the Social Security tax, the corporate income tax, and the inheritance tax. The only exemptions from the income tax would be mortgage interest or rent, charitable contributions, and income from Social Security and other transfer payments. This is just a broad outline, of course, and many details would have to be worked out with the voters and Congress. But some of the nitpicking sounds strained. The National Center for Policy Analysis says Brown's plan raises more money, Citizens for Tax Justice says less than is currently needed to run the budget. I suspect Brown's plan might come up short on a near-term view, but added growth matters more in the long run. Even if it turns out that we have to keep some other federal taxes on corporate profits, booze, or gasoline, or the rate has to be 15 percent, these are scarcely fatal flaws.

Unlike Brown, Hall and Rabushka, long promoters of "supply-side" economics, do not try to replace the Social Security tax. This helps pay for an unusually generous personal exemption from their 19 percent income tax. Also, Hall and Rabushka aim to exempt income from capital completely, while Brown would instead tax dividends, interest income, and capital gains at the same rate as salaries.

Amazingly, the editorial page of the *The New York Times* has endorsed the Hall-Rabushka plan. The *Times*'s main complaint with Brown's version is that it has not yet made room for a personal exemption, and that including one would lose revenue and thus require a tax rate higher than 13 percent. Yet remember that we already have a flat tax that exceeds 15 percent. It is called the Social Security tax. And it too falls on the very first dollar earned. Because Brown would scrap that tax, the net effect is to replace a 15 percent tax on low incomes with a 13 percent tax. Half of the current payroll tax ostensibly falls on employers, but that too is unquestionably borne by labor in lower wages or higher prices. And unlike the Social Security tax, which falls only on labor, Brown's tax treats income from labor or savings the same.

A personal exemption could easily be added to Brown's plan, without much revenue loss, by making it a "vanishing" exemption, which gradually drops to zero as income reaches some average. The modest expense could easily be covered by leaving a corporate tax in place, at the same rate as for individuals, thus avoiding any incentive to incorporate to avoid individual taxes. The corporate and individual taxes could be "integrated," as the *Times* suggests, by letting corporations deduct dividend expense as well as interest. This would not lose nearly as much money as myopic accountants assume, because it would end the incentive corporations now have to minimize taxes by maximizing debt. A politically sexier method of integration is to tax gross profits minus capital expenditures at the corporate level, then completely exempt all income from all individual savings—not just for those of us who have access to Keogh, 401K, and IRA plans. After all, we've already paid one tax when we earned money, and Brown would have us pay another when we spend it.

Some also object that Brown's 13 percent VAT would be "regressive," since poor folks spend every dime, while the affluent save. Even a *Wall Street Journal* editorial accepts this quaint notion, though it was rendered obsolescent long ago by Franco Modigliani's "life cycle" theory. Research confirms what Modigliani taught, which is that over any extended period, what most people earn and spend is largely the same. We can't borrow more than we can repay, and very few choose to live beneath their means for long. Young people get in debt while their incomes are rising, to acquire homes and durable goods. Later they start accumulating financial assets to finance college and retirement. Very few people are permanently poor or rich. Most start work at a low income, have temporary spells of low income between jobs, reach a peak income at middle age, and then get by on a low income again at retirement. The fact that the poorest fifth of consumers in 1988 spent an average of $10,893, though their incomes were only $4,942, shows that income in a single year is a very poor guide to income and wealth over even a few years, much less a lifetime. In the longer run, a tax on what people spend is therefore not much different from a tax on what they earn. Those in both the top and bottom fifths of the income distribution in any given year will normally spend close to 100 percent of what they earn over a lifetime, and thus end up paying the sales tax. To the minor extent that a sales tax may nonetheless bear a bit harder on lower incomes, it is still an efficient source of funds that can be used to help the poor, through rebates or social programs.

As for New York, Clinton hopes its residents prefer deducting local taxes from his own proposed 38 percent federal tax to paying a lower rate to the feds. Not likely. New York almost has flat tax, since the state's highest 7.9 percent rate kicks in at a pathetic income of $13,000, and the city tax is not much gentler. So the precious privilege of deducting state and city taxes of at least 10 percent from even the midrange 28 percent federal tax already leaves New Yorkers facing a marginal tax of 35 percent or more. Clinton would boost the top federal tax to 38 percent, which means 45 percent in New York, even after deducting state and local taxes.

Brown's plan instead adds the 10 percent state and city tax to a 13 percent federal tax. Clinton is going to have a rough time making Brown's 23 percent sound like more than his own 35-45 percent. Clinton's is actually worse than that, because adding Social Security taxes already pushes many New Yorkers into a 50 percent bracket with two modest salaries. This can't happen under Brown's plan, which discards the payroll tax.

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Some tax deductions would be scrapped in exchange for Brown's low tax rate, but only homeowners with substantial incomes itemize anyway. And Brown would give renters a break too, which will play well in greater New York City, where homeownership is still a luxury.

How and why Democrats ever let themselves be saddled with being the party dedicated to defending the IRS against the wrath of taxpayers is a mystery. Clinton has taken a short step in this direction with his middle-class tax cut. But Brown, for all his faults, has raised a far more tantalizing prospect. The way to give Bush a run for his PAC money is to outflank him on his weakest issue, offering to replace the incredible complexity of federal taxes with a clean, simple, low tax.

ALAN REYNOLDS is director of economic research at the Hudson Institute in Indianapolis.

Thatcher vs. Major.

THE LAST HARRUMPH

By John Nicolson

There is something rather disconcerting about ringing Margaret Thatcher's doorbell. First, you don't expect you'll be allowed to. Some sort of forcefield—or at least a London bobby—will, you assume, block the path. So by the time your finger is on the ringer and all you've had to do is wave press identification at the sole policeman on duty, you are already suffering from shock.

One evening not long ago, I found myself in exactly this situation, poised on the front porch of the Leaderene's Belgravia home, my finger quivering before a second and final ring when the door opened. The BBC had asked me to drop by to ask her how she thought John Major was performing, one week into the British election campaign.

"Hello," Mrs. Thatcher said, fixing me with her legendary eyeball-stopper.

"Hello, prime minister," I replied anachronistically.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you," I said, "but everyone is very keen to know how you think the campaign is going. It's the first Tory campaign for thirteen years that you haven't run. It's not going well for your party. And people want to know why you're keeping so quiet."

Mrs. Thatcher wasn't taking the bait. She thanked me for my call, but told me she had dinner guests and had no comment to make. We parted amicably. It had been our first meeting. As an erstwhile student leftist I did wonder fleetingly whether, as I walked away, the elements would change *Omen*-style and I'd be impaled by a piece of falling ironwork, but I did manage to leave the vicinity quite safely. But none the wiser.

"No comment" has become the mantra of Mrs T in 1992, and one that she repeats with no obvious sign of excruciation. Of course everyone knows that Thatcher is none too pleased either with the way the country is being run or with the way she is being treated by the Tories at arm's length, holding their collective up-turned noses. She thinks that John Major, once her protégé, has sold out. He's abandoned her poll tax, sent out placatory messages to the Scots, now clamoring for home rule, borrowed money to finance pre-election tax cuts—and gets on swimmingly with Europeans. No Thatcherite he.

The brutality with which Thatcher was dispatched from her post as prime minister a year and a half ago still clearly rankles her. The brutality has continued. In this campaign, the very mention of her has been regarded as electoral suicide by Tory elders. When they've deigned to use the woman who won them three landslides in succession, they've had her visit right-wing candidates in extremely distant suburbs, where the buzz of Thatcherism is still as comforting as the sound of Sunday morning lawn mowers.

And she's been very good. A party animal to the last, she hasn't once voiced open dissent. But her silence has spoken volumes. She'll go out of her way to avoid endorsing "The Manifesto"—the Tories' published policy program due to be put before the electorate on April 9. And she seems to have developed an inexplicable inability to pronounce the prime minister's name without curling her stiff upper lip. When she refers to his current office, which is rarely, she calls him "Prime Minister Major." Now, "Prime Minister Major" is not British usage. He's normally just called "The Prime Minister." But out on the campaign trail Mrs. Thatcher calls him "Prime Minister Major" as if he doesn't really have anything to do with Britain, but represents a somewhat distasteful and obscure foreign country, in London for a state visit.

She talks constantly—and longingly—of the recent past. Why should voters vote for the Tories? asked a former subject.

"Well, look at what we did in the '80s. We turned Britain around. We beat the socialists and the trade unionists, and defied the Argentinians."

Why should people trust Mr. Major to run the country in the 1990s?

"Well, look at what I achieved. Everywhere I go people say to me, 'Thank you. Thank you for all you did for Britain.'"

Ever since our doorstep encounter I've been following Mrs. Thatcher round obscure suburbs, through malls. She gives sermons to a hundred or so preselected blue-rinsed Tory ladies at a time. They gather at the invitation-only meetings organized by local branches of the party. Many cry when she speaks.

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When she does meet unconvinced citizens, they're normally under 12 years of age, and believe she's not real, but a fictional character from a long-running, now suspended, soap opera. And she isn't good with children. Queen Victoria once said that Gladstone addressed her as if she were a public meeting. Mrs. Thatcher scolds children as if they're naughty Cabinet ministers.

And the press shout out questions.

"Mrs. Thatcher, your party's struggling in this election. What's gone wrong?" demands the correspondent from Independent Television News in the English Midlands.

Mrs. Thatcher won't say. Instead she chooses to keep up an unbroken splurge of anodyne verbiage, avoiding hesitation at all costs. She triumphed at the game last Friday, as a batch of new polls showed the Labour Party stretching its lead. Mrs. Thatcher, the woman on whom the fortunes of the Conservative Party had rested so recently, found herself at a garden center in the London suburbs, examining foliage. As members of the press pack worked themselves into a frenzy, Mrs. T kept up a constant flow about flowers. She vociferously planned the decoration of a sun deck, spending $90 on various potted plants.

Eventually, however, the Tories panicked, and dragged her back into the fray for a brief joint speaking engagement with her successor. It was not just the usual bland photo opportunity, but a morale-boosting session for party candidates. We waited for the Major put-down. It was accomplished with quintessentially British understatement. Questioned by journalists before the rally on whether she would have run the campaign differently, she said that the issue was irrelevant: "Mr. Major is prime minister. I am an ex-prime minister." She endorsed her successor in a statement ringing with ambiguity. Mr. Major was his own man. The last three (successful) Tory campaigns had been hers. This one was, of course, different. It had, she said, Mr. Major's stamp written all over it.

JOHN NICOLSON is a reporter for BBC television news.

ARIEL POSTCARD

UNSETTLED

By Alexander Star

The West Bank has no borders on Israeli maps, and it is easy to cross into the territories unknowingly, especially if you are traveling with a group of foreign journalists. North from Jerusalem, the road coils by crooked hills and olive trees, a rocky Aegean-like landscape. On a slope overlooking Nablus, we visit an army camp where two tables have been set for us—one for snacks, the other for confiscated weapons of the intifada: kitchen knives, revolvers, axes, swords. A training exercise is in progress, and a soldier in Arab disguise clambers up the hill, pursued by other soldiers. "But you'll provoke the neighbors!" worries a woman. The neighbors have probably been provoked before. As the nearby mosques begin to sing, the soldiers stand quietly on the terrace, whistling into their instant coffee.

Skirting the casbah, we drive through the city, viewing colorless, comfortable villas and dusty garages from behind tinted, stone-proof (that is, intifada-proof) glass. Groups of men stare at the bus sullenly without speaking. We are enjoying a combination package of high-security tourism and picture-postcard Zionism. From Joseph's tomb, right in the heart of Nablus, it is only a short ride past the refugee camps, which are fenced off from the road for the protection of passing vehicles, up to the seemingly isolated place known as Ariel.

Built on a mountaintop, Ariel is among the largest Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Ten thousand people inhabit the gleaming white villas set along steep, winding streets. By the end of the decade, 10,000 more are expected. Most of the residents are neither religious extremists nor strident nationalists. They are young, resolutely secular couples seeking affordable homes. (Last month a converted chicken coop near Jerusalem rented for $1,000 a month.) Although bitterly resentful of those who impugn their address, these "pioneers" are more concerned with the road to Tel Aviv than with the road to peace. In the winter rain, the streets are deserted, and it is difficult to distinguish the suburban quiet from colonial isolation.

In honor of the bombing of Baghdad, one of Ariel's main streets was named "George Bush Jan. 15th Blvd." There are no plans to change the name, at least not yet, but the president's popularity is not very high on his own thoroughfare. The residents of Ariel look with suspicion on the peace talks, and even the mayor's soothing assistant communicates unease and anger. So does the glossy town magazine: with its smiling faces and its construction-site snapshots, "Shalom Ariel" could be a brochure for any condo park. But politics quickly intrude into the booklet, as rancorous attacks on the peace process alternate with doublespeak like this: "According to an Arab friend of mine, 'We know in our hearts that many of our friends would still be alive today if not for the influence of Saudi dollars. Israel, on the other hand, has only been protecting her own existence.'"

Although it is provocatively built near a highly populated area, and is highly populated itself, Ariel bills itself as an everyday settlement, a community based on domestic, not messianic, designs. One homeowner even told an Israeli newspaper: "I am living here until the evacuation that I hope will happen tomorrow, or

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until I succeed in moving to Jerusalem, which is what I hope will happen first." But there is a brittle edge to other settlers' dreams, a recurring fear of betrayal. When asked what she would do if forced to leave her home, a Montreal-born resident says she would drive straight to Ben-Gurion airport and leave the country. Her government brought her here, how can it throw her out? This surprised me. The settlers are often portrayed as superpatriots, but this woman seemed driven by a private and very particular fantasy of adventure and acreage. She would abandon Israel before she would abandon that dream.

Aside from the peace movement and the settlers themselves, few Israeli politicians are eager to discuss the settlements with Americans. When asked, they generally insist the issue has been exaggerated; Bush and Baker, they claim, have made mountains out of landfills. Not so Benny Begin, son of the late prime minister, who told my group (sponsored by the American Zionist Federation) that the settlements are among the many great, unheralded steps Israel has taken toward peace. Not "obstacles to peace," in the State Department mantra, but obstacles to war. Why? Because they will forever forbid the establishment of a Palestinian state, which would be by necessity a terrorist state and therefore a menace not only to Israel's security but to the world's.

Such arguments often proceed for a long time without any mention of the 1.7 million Palestinians who live in the territories. But what does a fervent believer in an "expanded Jewish presence in Judea and Samaria" really think he is getting into? Is there any choice, really, between leaving some of these places to the Palestinians and forcing Palestinians to leave them? I asked Begin what he imagined the situation would be on the West Bank twenty years from now, assuming that settlement continues as planned and Israelis are not forced into a territorial compromise they don't want. Begin found the question unwelcome: "These days," he teased, riffling through his calendar, "I only speak sincerely on the 29th of February of every leap year."

He went on to offer the Likud line that if Israel's security were assured, it would offer citizenship to the Palestinians on the West Bank. "And risk the dissolution of Israel's Jewish identity?" I asked. No, of course not. By "security," he meant a demographically secure Jewish majority, guaranteed by a massive exodus of Jews from Europe or the United States. This line of thought derives from Likud's ancestor Vladimir Jabotinsky, who opposed the principle of partition, and held that once the Arabs came to accept a Jewish majority, they might enjoy equal rights within the state's "iron wall." Begin's assumption of a Jewish majority is no more demographically sound today than Jabotinsky's was in his day. And so his offer of citizenship is really no offer at all. It is hard to imagine a day of peace so perfect that it would meet Begin's, and the Likud's, standard for "security." Even if the Palestinians in the territories were never to fling another pebble, citizenship in a national community would most likely be denied them forever.

Supporters of settlement may be disingenuous about some things, but they are very sincere when it comes to the rights of Jews. No one can tell a Jew where he can or cannot live, goes the argument. To say otherwise would be un-American, or even worse, segregationist. One of the ironies of Israeli politics is that while supporters of territorial compromise fret about preserving a "Jewish majority," annexationists like Begin are able to pose as liberal pluralists—favoring Arab citizenship (eventually) and Jewish "integration" into the territories (immediately). *The Jerusalem Post* charges that a freeze on construction would be un-American unless it includes Arab building. William Safire complains that Secretary of State James Baker is trying to "limit the settlement of the West Bank to Arabs only," as if those Arabs didn't live there already. To Cynthia Ozick, opposition to settlements betrays a "distaste for pluralism." (Unlike, say, opposition to busing?)

But this ardent plea for integration and freedom is hardly made in good faith. For the stirring words *a Jew must be allowed to live anywhere in his historical land* must be translated into what they really mean: *a Jew must be able to live anywhere in his historical land as a citizen of a Jewish state.* That is a less moving claim. The settlers wish not only to live in a particular holy place, they wish also to live there under a particular national flag. In accepting the principle of partition, however, Zionist leaders long ago distinguished the principle of settlement in Palestine from the achievement of sovereignty over a part of it. A Jew's right of return to every corner of the holy land was suspended in exchange for his or her right to citizenship in a limited but sovereign state.

The people of Ariel, as Begin hastens to concede, are not there to serve as human bargaining chips. They are there to guarantee permanent Israeli control of the territories. And swiftly. In 1989 the government financed 900 housing units in the West Bank; in 1991, 14,000. This year the settler population is projected to increase by 21 percent. If it continues to increase at a rate of 10 percent, there will be 500,000 Jews in the West Bank (and East Jerusalem, which is another matter) within fifteen years. It may be that settlements are not the primary obstacle to peace, that no real political solutions are possible until Arab states unequivocally recognize Israel's right to exist. But the question remains: Should that day ever come, what sort of compromise is imaginable if the settling goes on? Shamir stirs Israeli fears that Bush and Baker are determined to push Israel back to its pre-1967 borders. But Shamir must know that the settlements not only prohibit the redrawing of those borders, they prohibit the drawing of any borders at all. When Shamir vows he will never trade land for peace, there is no reason to doubt that he means it. •

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The newer meaning of treason: Philby, England, Russia, and a postage stamp.

Collector's Item

By Joseph Brodsky

If you sit long on the bank of the river, you may see the body of your enemy floating by.

—Chinese proverb

I.

Given the lunacy this piece deals with, it ought to be written in a language other than English. The only option available to me, however, is Russian, which is the very source of the lunacy in question. Who needs tautology? Besides, several of the assertions I am going to make are, in their turn, quite loony, and best checked by a language that has a reputation for being analytical. Who wants to have his insights ascribed to the vagaries of some highly inflected language? Nobody, perhaps, save those who keep asking what language I think or dream in. One dreams in dreams, I reply, and thinks in thoughts. A language gets into the picture only when one has to make those things public. This, of course, gets me nowhere. Still (I persevere) since English isn't my mother tongue, since my grip on its grammar isn't that tight, my thoughts, for example, could get quite garbled. I sure hope that they don't; at any rate I can tell them from dreams. And believe it or not, dear reader, this sort of quibbling, which normally gets one nowhere, brings you straight to the core of our story. For no matter how its author solves his dilemma, no matter what language he settles for, his very ability to choose a language makes him, in your eyes, suspect; and suspicions are what this piece is all about. Who is he, you may wonder about the author, what is he up to? Is he trying to promote himself to the status of a disembodied intelligence? If it were only you, dear reader, inquiring about the author's identity, that would be fine. The trouble is, he wonders about his identity himself—and for the same reason. Who are you, the author asks himself in two languages, and gets startled no less than you would upon hearing his own voice muttering something that amounts to "Well, I don't know." A mongrel, then, ladies and gentleman, this is a mongrel speaking. Or else a centaur.

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II.

This is the summer of 1991, August. That much at least is certain. Elizabeth Taylor is about to take her eighth walk down the aisle, this time with a blue-collar boy of Polish extraction. A serial killer with cannibalistic urges is apprehended in Milwaukee; the cops find three hard-boiled skulls in his fridge. Russia's Great Panhandler makes his rounds in London with cameras zeroing in, as it were, on his empty tin. The more it changes, the more it stays the same: like the weather. And the more it tries to stay the same, the more it changes: like a face. And judging by the "weather," this could easily be 1891. On the whole, geography (European geography in particular) leaves history very few options. A country, especially a large one, gets only two. Either it's strong or it's weak. Fig. 1: Russia. Fig. 2: Germany. For most of the century, the former tried to play it big and strong (at what cost is another matter). Now its turn has come to be weak: by the year 2000 it will be where it was in 1900, and about the same perimeter. The latter, Germany, will be there, too. (At long last it dawned on the descendants of Wotan that saddling their neighbors with debt is a more stable and less costly form of occupation than sending in troops.) The more it changes, the more it stays the same. Still, you can't tell time by weather. Faces are better: the more one tries to stay the same, the more it changes. Fig. 1: Miss Taylor's. Fig. 2: one's own. The summer of 1991, then, August. Can one tell a mirror from a tabloid?

III.

And here is one such, of humble strikebreaking origins. Actually it is a literary paper, *The London Review of Books* by name, which came into existence several years ago when the London *Times* and its Literary Supplement went on strike for a few months. In order not to leave the public without literary news and the benefits of liberal opinion, *LRB* was launched and evidently blossomed. Eventually the *Times* and its Literary Supplement resumed operation, but *LRB* stayed afloat, proof not so much of the growing diversity of reading tastes as of burgeoning demography. No individual I know subscribes to both papers, unless he is a publisher. It's largely a matter of one's budget, not to mention one's attention span or one's plain loyalty. And I wonder, for instance, which one of these—the latter, I should hope—prevented me from purchasing a recent issue in a small Belsize Park bookstore, where I and my young lady ventured the other day on our way to the movies. Budgetary considerations as well as my attention span—alarming as it may be of late—must be ruled out: the most recent issue of the LRB sat there on the counter in full splendor, its cover depicting a blown-up postal stamp: unmistakably of Soviet origins. This sort of thing has been enough to catch my eye since I was 12. In its own turn, the stamp depicted a bespectacled man with silver neatly parted hair. Above and underneath the face, the stamp's legend, in now-fashionable Cyrillic, went as follows: "Soviet Secret Agent Kim Philby (1912-1988)." He looked indeed like Alec Guinness, with a touch perhaps of Trevor Howard. I reached into my pocket for two one-pound coins, caught the salesboy's friendly glance, adjusted my vocal chords for some highly pitched, civilized "May I have ...," and then turned 90 degrees and walked out of the store. I must add that I didn't do it abruptly, that I man-

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aged to send the boy at the counter a "just changed my mind" nod and to collect, with the same nod, my young lady.

IV.

As we had some time to kill before the show, we went into a nearby café. "What's the matter with you?" my young comrade-in-arms asked me once we sat down. "You look like . . . " I didn't interrupt her. I knew how I felt and actually wondered what it might look like. "You look, you look . . . sideways," she continued hesitantly, tentatively, since English wasn't her mother tongue either. "You look as if you can't face the world any longer, can't look straight in the world's eye," she managed finally. "Something like that," she added just in case, to widen the margin of error. Well, I thought, one is always a greater reality for others than for oneself, and vice versa. What are we here for but to be observed. If that's what "it" really looks like from the outside, then I am doing fine—and so, perhaps, is the bulk of the human race. For I felt like throwing up, like a great deal of barf was welling up in my throat. Still, while I wasn't puzzled by the situation, I was surprised by its intensity. "What's the matter?" asked my young lady. "What's wrong?" And now, dear reader, after trying to figure out who the author of this piece is and what its timing, we've got to find out also who is its audience. Do you remember, dear reader, who Kim Philby was and what he did? If you do, then you are around 50 and thus, in a manner of speaking, on your way out. What you are going to hear, therefore, will be of little import to you, still of lesser comfort. Your game is up, you are too far gone; this stuff won't change anything for you. If, on the other hand, you've never heard of Kim Philby, this means that you are in your 30s, life lies ahead, all this is an ancient history and of no possible use or entertainment value for you, unless you are some sort of a spy buff. So? So where does all this leave our author, the question of his identity still hanging? Can a disembodied intelligence rightfully expect to find an able-bodied audience? I say, hardly, and I say who gives a damn.

V.

All of this leaves our author at the close of the twentieth century with a very bad taste in his mouth. That, of course, is to be expected in a mouth that is in its 50s. But let's stop being cute with each other, dear reader, let's get down to business. Kim Philby was a Briton, and he was a spy. He worked for the British Intelligence Service, for MI5 or MI6, or both—who cares about all that arcana and whatever it stands for—but he spied for the Russians. In the parlance of the trade, he was a mole, though we are not going to use that lingo here. I am not a spy buff, not an aficionado of that genre, and never was; neither in my 30s nor even in my 50s, and let me tell you why. First, because espionage provides a good plot, but seldom palatable prose. In fact, the upsurge of spy novels in our time is the byproduct of modernism's emphasis on texture, which left literature in practically all European languages absolutely plotless: the reaction was inevitable, but with few exceptions, equally execrable. Still, aesthetic objections are of little consequence to you, dear reader, aren't they, and that in itself tells the time as accurately as the calendar or a tabloid. Let's try ethics, then, on which everyone seems to be an expert. I, for one, have always regarded espionage as the vilest human pursuit, mainly, I guess, because I grew up in a country the advancement of whose fortunes was inconceivable to its natives. To do that, one indeed had to be a foreigner; and that's perhaps why the country took such pride in its cops, fellow travelers, and secret agents, commemorating them in all manner of ways, from stamps to plaques to monuments. Ah, all those Richard Zorges, Pablo Nerudas, and Hewlett Jonsons, and so on, all that pulp of our youth! Ah, all those flicks shot in Latvia or in Estonia for the "Western" backdrop! A foreign surname and the neon lettering of "Hotel" (always put vertically, never horizontally), sometimes the screeching brakes of a Czech-made motorcar. The goal was not so much verisimilitude or suspense as the legitimization of the system by the exploits on its behalf outside of it. You could get a bar scene with a little combo toiling in the background, you could get a blonde with a tin-can taffeta skirt and a decent nose job looking positively non-Slavic. Two or three of our actors, too, looked sufficiently gaunt and lanky, the emphasis being always on a thoroughbred beak. A German-sounding name for a spy was better than a French one, a French one was better than a Spanish one, a Spanish one was better than an Italian one (come to think of it, I can't recall a single Italian Soviet secret agent). The English were tops, but hard to come by. In any case, neither English landscapes nor street scenes were ever attempted on our big screens, as we lacked vehicles with steering wheels on the right. Ah, those were the days—but I've digressed.

VI.

Who cares what country one grows up in, and whether it colors one's view of espionage? Too bad if it does, because then one is robbed of a source of entertainment—perhaps not of the most delectable kind, but entertainment nonetheless. In view of what surrounds us, not to mention what lies ahead, this is barely forgivable. Dearth of action is the mother of the motion picture. And if one indeed loathes spies, there still remains spy-catching, which is as engrossing as it is righteous. What's wrong with a little paranoia, with a bit of manifest schizophrenia? Isn't there something recognizable and therefore therapeutic to their paperback and Bakelite video versions? And what's any aversion, including this aversion toward spies, if not a hidden neurosis, an echo of some childhood trauma? First therapy, then ethics.

VII.

The face of Kim Philby on that stamp. The face of the late Mr. Philby, Esq., of Brighton, Sussex, or of Welwyn Garden, Herts, or of Ambala, India—you name it. The face of an Englishman in the Soviet employ. The pulp writer's dream come true. Presumably, the rank of general, if the poor sod cared for such trifles; presumably, highly decorated, maybe a Hero of the Soviet Union. Though the snapshot used for the stamp shows none of that. Here he appears in his civvies, which is what he donned for most of his life: the dark coat and the tie. The medals and the epaulets were saved for the red velvet cushion of a soldier's funeral, if he had one. Which I think he did, his employers being suckers for top-secret solemnity. Many moons ago, reviewing a book about a chum of his for the TLS, I suggested that, considering his service to the Soviet State, this now aging Moscow denizen should be buried in the Kremlin wall. I mention this since I've been told that he was one of the few TLS subscribers in Moscow. He ended up, though, I believe, in the Protestant cemetery, his employers being sticklers for propriety, albeit posthumously. (Had Her Majesty's government been handling these matters, it could hardly have

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done better.) And now I feel little pangs of remorse. I imagine him interred, clad in the same coat and tie shown on the stamp, wearing this disguise—or was it a uniform?—in death as in life. Presumably he left some instructions concerning this eventuality, although he couldn't have been fully certain whether they would be followed. Were they? And what did he want on his tombstone? A line of English poetry, perhaps? Something like "And death shall have no dominion"? Or did he prefer a matter-of-fact "Soviet Secret Agent Kim Philby (1912-1988)"? And did he want it in Cyrillic?

VIII.

Back to hidden neurosis and childhood trauma, to therapy and ethics. When I was 24, I was after a girl, and in a big way. She was slightly older than I, and after a while I began to feel that something was amiss. I sensed that I was being deceived, perhaps even two-timed. It turned out, of course, that I wasn't wrong, but that was later. At the time I simply grew suspicious, and one evening I decided to track her down. I hid myself in an archway across the street from her building, waited there for about an hour, and when she emerged from her poorly lit entrance, I followed her for several blocks. I was tense with excitement, but of an unfamiliar nature. At the same time I felt vaguely bored, as I knew more or less what I might discover. The excitement grew with every step, with every evasive action I took; the boredom stayed at the same level. When she turned to the river, my excitement reached its crescendo, and at that point I stopped, turned around, and headed for a nearby café. Later I would blame my abandoning the chase on my laziness and reproach myself, especially in the light—or, rather, in the dark—of this affair's denouement, playing an Actaeon to the dogs of my own hindsight. The truth was less innocent and more absorbing. The truth was that I stopped because I had discovered the nature of my excitement. It was the joy of a hunter pursuing his prey. In other words, it was something atavistic, primordial. This realization had nothing to do with ethics, with scruples, taboos, or anything of the sort. I had no problem with conferring upon the girl the status of prey. It's just that I hated being the hunter. A matter of temperament, perhaps? Perhaps. Perhaps had the world been subdivided into the four humors, or at least boiled down to four humor-based political parties, it would be a better place. Yet I think that one's resistance to turning into a hunter, the ability to spot and to control the hunting impulse, has to do with something more basic than temperament, upbringing, social values, received wisdom, ecclesiastical affiliation, or one's concept of honor. It has to do with the degree of one's evolution, with the species' evolution, with reaching the stage marked by one's inability to regress. One loathes spies not so much because of their low rung on the evolutionary ladder, but because betrayal invites you to descend.

IX.

Dear reader, if this sounds to you like an oblique way of bragging about one's own virtues, so be it. Virtue, after all, is far from being synonymous with survival; duplicity is. But you will accept, dear reader, won't you, that there is a hierarchy between love and betrayal. And you also know that it is the former that ushers in the latter, not vice versa. What's worse, you know that the latter outlasts the former. So there is not much to brag about, even when you are absolutely smitten or besotted, is there? If one is not a Darwinist, if one still sticks to Cuvier, it is because lower organisms seem to be more viable than complex ones. Look at moss, look at algae. I understand that I am out of my depth here. All I am trying to say is that to an advanced organism duplicity is, at worst, an option; for a lower one, however, it is the means of survival. In this sense, spies don't choose to be spies any more than a lizard chooses its pigmentation: they just can't do any better. Duplicity, after all, is a form of mimicry; it is this particular animal's maximum. One could argue with this proposition if spies spied for money, but the best of them do it out of conviction. In their pursuit, they are driven by excitement, better yet by instinct unchecked by boredom. For boredom interferes with instinct. Boredom is the mark of a highly evolved species; a sign of civilization, if you will.

X.

Whoever it was who ordered this stamp's issue was no doubt making a statement. Especially given the current political climate, the warming of East-West relations and all. The decision must have been made on high, in the Kremlin's own hallowed chambers, since the Foreign Ministry would have been up in arms against it, not to mention the Ministry of Finances, such as they are. You don't bite the hand that feeds you. Or do you? You do if your teeth are those of the CSS—the Committee for State Security (a.k.a., the KGB)—which is larger than both those ministries to begin with, not only in the number of employees but in the place it occupies in the conscience and the subconscious of the powerful and the powerless alike. If you are that big, you may bite any hand you like, and, for that matter, throats too. You may do it for several reasons. Out of vanity: to remind the jubilant West of your existence. Or out of inertia: you're used to biting that hand anyway. Or out of nostalgia for the good old days, when your diet was rich in the enemy's protein because you had a constant supply of it in your compatriots. Still, for all the grossness of the CSS's appetite, one senses behind this stamp initiative a particular individual: the head of a Directorate, or perhaps his deputy, or just a humble case officer who came up with the idea. He might simply have revered Philby, or wanted to get ahead in his department; or, on the contrary, he may have been approaching retirement and, like many people of that generation, truly believed in the didactic value of a postage stamp. None of these things contradicts one another. They are fully compatible: vanity, inertia, nostalgia, reverence, careerism, naïveté; and the brain of the CSS's average employee is as good a place for their confluence as any, including a computer. What's puzzling about this stamp, however, is the promptness with which it has been issued: only two years after Mr. Philby's demise. His shoes, as well as the gloves that he always wore on account of a skin allergy, were, so to speak, still warm. Issuing a stamp in any country takes a hell of a lot of time, and normally it is preceded by national recognition of its subject. Even if one skips this requirement (the man was, after all, a secret agent), the speed with which the stamp was produced is amazing, given the thick of bureaucratic hurdles it ought to have gone through. It obviously didn't; it was evidently rushed into production. Which leaves you with this sense of personal involvement, of an individual will behind this four-centimeter-square piece of paper. And you ask yourself about the motive behind that will. And you understand that somebody wanted to make a statement. *Urbi et orbi*, as it were. And, as a part of the orbus, you wonder what sort of statement that was.

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XI.

The answer is: menacing and spiteful; also profoundly provincial. One judges an undertaking, I'm afraid, by its result. The stamp subjects the late Mr. Philby to the ultimate ignominy, to the final slight: it proclaims a Briton to be Russia's own, not so much in spirit—what's so special about that?—but precisely in body. No doubt Philby asked for that. He spied for the Soviet Union for a good quarter of a century. For another quarter of a century he simply lived in the Soviet Union, and wasn't entirely idle either. On top of that, he died there, and was interred in Russian soil. The stamp is essentially his tombstone's replica. Also we shouldn't discount the possibility that he might have been pleased by his masters' posthumous treatment: he was stupid enough, and secrecy is a hotbed of vanity. He could even have approved (if not initiated himself) the stamp project. Yet one can't help feeling some violation here, something deeper than the desecration of a grave: a violation that is elemental. He was, after all, a Briton, and the Brits are used to dying in odd places. What's revolting about this stamp is its proprietary sentiment; it's as though the earth that swallowed the poor sod licks its lips with profound satisfaction and says, he is mine. Or else it licks the stamp.

XII.

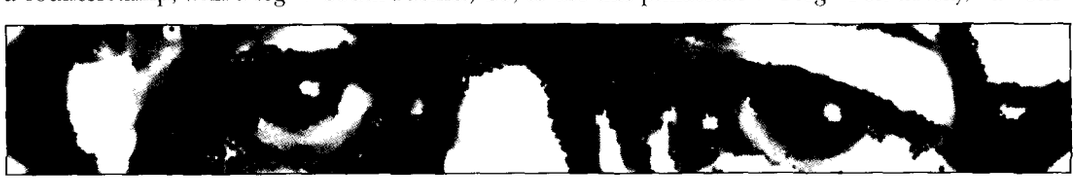
Such was the statement that a humble case officer, or a bunch of them at CSS, wished to make, and did, and that a liberal literary paper of humble strikebreaking origins has found so amusing. Well, let's say point taken. What should be done about it, if anything? Should we try to disinter the unholy remains and bring them back to Britain? Should we petition the Soviet government or offer it a large sum? Or should Her Majesty's Postmaster issue perhaps a counterstamp, with a legend something like "English Traitor, Kim Philby, 1912-1988," in English, of course, and see whether some Russian paper reprints it? Should we try to retrieve the idea of this man, despite himself, from the collective psyche of his masters? And anyway who are these "we" who provide your author, dear reader, with such rhetorical comfort? No, nothing of the sort could, or for that matter should, be done. Philby belongs there, body and soul. Let him rot in peace. But what one—and I emphasize this "one"—can do, and therefore should do, is rob the aforementioned collective psyche of its ownership of that unholy relic, rob it of the comfort it thinks it enjoys. And in fact it's easy to do this. For, in spite of himself, Kim Philby wasn't theirs. Considering where we are today, and especially where Russia is, it is obvious that, for all its industry, cunning, human toil, and investment of time and currency, the Philby enterprise was a bust. Were he a British double-agent, he couldn't inflict a greater damage on the system whose fortunes he was actually trying to advance. But double or triple, he was a British agent through and through, for the bottom line of his quite extraordinary effort is a sharp sense of futility. Futility is so hideously British. And now for the fun part.

XIII.

In the few spy novels that I read as a child, the role of the postage stamp was as grand as the item itself was small, and would yield only to that of a torn photograph, the appearance of the other half of which often would clinch the plot. On the stamp's sticky side, a spy in those novels would convey in his chicken scrawl, or on a microfilm, the secret message to his master, or vice versa. The Philby stamp is thus a fusion of the torn man with the medium-is-the-message principle; as such, it is a collector's item. To this we might add also that the priciest things in the stamp-collecting world are those issued by political or geographical ephemera—by short-lived or defunct states, negligible potentates or specks of land. (The most sought-after item in my childhood, I recall, was a stamp from Pitcairn Island—a British colony, as it happens, in the South Pacific.) So, to use this philatelist logic, the issue of the Philby stamp appears to be a cry from the Soviet Union's future. At any rate, there is something in its future that, in the guise of the CSS, asks for that. Actually, this is a fine time for philatelists, and in more ways than one. One even can speak of philatelist justice here—the way one speaks of poetic license. For half a century ago, when the CSS warriors were deporting people from the Baltic states that the USSR invaded and rendered defunct, it was precisely philatelists who clinched the list of social categories subject to removal. (In fact, the list ended with the Esperantists, the philatelists being the penultimate category. There were, if memory serves me right, sixty-four such categories; the list began with the leaders and active members of political parties, followed by university professors, journalists, teachers, businessmen, and so on. It came with a highly detailed set of instructions as to how to separate the provider from his family, children from their mothers, and so forth, down to the actual wording of sentences like "Your daddy went to get hot water from the station boiler." The whole thing was rather well thought through and signed by CSS General Serov. I saw the document with my own eyes; the country of application was Lithuania.) This, perhaps, is the source of a retiring case officer's belief in the didactic power of a stamp. Well, nothing pleases the tired eyes of an impartial observer so much as the sight of things coming full circle.

XIV.

Let's not dismiss, though, the didactic powers of the stamp. This one at least could have been issued to encourage the CSS's present and future employees, and was no doubt distributed among the former for free, a modest fringe benefit. As for the latter, one can imagine the stamp doing rather well with a young recruit. The establishment is big on visuals, on iconography, its monitoring abilities being justly famous for their omniscience, not to mention omnivorousness. When it comes to didactic purposes, especially among its own brethren, the organization readily goes the extra mile. When Oleg Pen'kovsky, a GRU man who betrayed Soviet military secrets to the British in the 1960s, was finally caught, the establishment (or so I was told) filmed his execution. Strapped to a stretcher, Pen'kovsky is wheeled into the Moscow city crematorium's chamber. An attendant opens the



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furnace door and two other attendants start to push the stretcher and its contents into the roaring furnace; the flame is already licking the screaming man's soles. At this point a voice comes over the loudspeaker interrupting the procedure because another body is scheduled for this time slot. Screaming but unable to kick, Pen'kovsky is pulled back; another body arrives and after a small ceremony is pushed into the furnace. The voice comes over the loudspeaker again: now it's Pen'kovsky's turn, and in he goes. A small but effective skit. Beats Beckett hands down, boosts morale, and can't be forgotten: it brands your wits. A kind of stamp, if you will: for intramural correspondence.

XV.

Before we set out for the fun part in earnest, dear reader, let me say this. There is a distinction between the benefit of hindsight and having lived long enough to see heads' tails. This is not a disclaimer; quite the contrary, most of your author's assertions are borne out by his life, and if they are wrong then he blew it, at least partially. Still, even if they are accurate, a good question remains. Is he entitled to pass judgment upon those who are no longer around—who have lost? Outlasting your opponent gives you the sense of membership in a victorious majority, of having played your cards right. Aren't you then applying the law retroactively? Aren't you punishing the poor buggers under a code of conscience foreign to them and to their times? Well, I am not troubled by this, and for three reasons. First, because Kim Philby kicked the bucket at the ripe age of 76; as I write this, I am still 26 years behind him in the game, my catching-up prospects being very dim. Second, because what he believed in for most of his life, allegedly to its very end, has been utter garbage to me at least since the age of 16, though no benefit of foresight can be claimed here, let alone obtained. Third, because the baseness of the human heart and the vulgarity of the human mind never expire with the demise of their most gifted exponents. What I must disclaim, however, is any pretense to expertise in the field I am wading through. As I say, I am no spy buff. Of Philby's life, for instance, I know only the bare bones, if that. I've never read his biography, in English or in Russian, nor do I expect I ever will. Of the options available to a human being, he chose the most redundant one: to betray one set of people to another. This sort of subject is not worthy of study; intuition will suffice. I am also not terribly good with dates, though I normally try to check them. So the reader should decide for himself at this stage whether he is going to proceed with this stuff any further. I certainly will. I suppose I should bill the following as a fantasy. Well, it isn't.

XVI.

On Marchember umpteenth, Nineteen Filthy Fine, in Brooklyn, New York, agents of the FBI arrested a Soviet spy. In a small apartment filled with photo equipment, on a floor strewn with microfilm, stood a little middle-aged man with beady eyes, an aquiline profile, and a balding forehead, his Adam's apple moving busily: he was swallowing a scrap of paper containing some top-secret information. Otherwise the man offered no resistance. Instead he proudly declared: "I am Colonel of the Red Army Rudolph Abel, and I demand to be treated as such in accordance with the Geneva Convention." Needless to say, the tabloids went ape, in the States and all over the place. The colonel was tried, got donkey years, and was locked up, if I remember correctly, in Sing-Sing. There he mostly played pool. In Nineteen Sissy Through or thereabouts he was exchanged at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin for Gary Powers, the unlucky U-2 pilot who made headlines for the last time just a few years ago when he went down again, this time near L.A., in a helicopter, and for good. Rudolph Abel returned to Moscow, retired, and made no headlines, save that he became the most feared pool shark in Moscow and its vicinity. He died in Nineteen Cementy and was buried, with scaled-down military honors, at Novodevichie Cemetery in Moscow. No stamp was issued for him. Or was one? I may have missed it. Or the British literary paper of humble origin missed it. Perhaps he didn't earn a stamp: what's four years in Sing-Sing to a lifelong record? And besides, he wasn't a foreigner, just another displaced native. In any case, no stamp for Rudolph Abel, just a tombstone.

XVII.

But what do we read on this tombstone? We read: "Willie Fischer, a.k.a Rudolph Abel, 1903-1971," in Cyrillic, of course. Now that's a bit too long for a stamp's legend, but not for us. (Ah, dear reader, look at what we've got here: spies, stamps, cemeteries, tombstones! But wait, there's more: poets, painters, assassinations, exiles, Arab sheikhs, murder weapons, stolen cars, and more stamps!) But let's try to make this long story short. Once upon a time—in 1936-38 in Spain, to be precise—there were two men: Willie Fischer and Rudolph Abel. They were colleagues and they were close friends. So close that other employees of the same enterprise called them "Fischerabel." But nothing untoward, dear reader, they were simply inseparable, partly because of the work they did. They were a team. The enterprise for which they toiled was the Soviet intelligence outfit that handled the messy side of the Spanish Civil War's business. That's the side where you find bullet-riddled bodies miles away from the trenches. Anyway, the outfit's boss was a fellow by the name of Orlov, who prior to his Spanish assignment headed the entire Soviet counterintelligence operation for Western Europe out of an office in the Soviet Embassy in the French capital. We'll play with him later—or, as the case may be, he will play with us. For the moment let's say that Orlov was very close with Fischerabel. Not as close as they were with each other, but very close. Nothing untoward there either, since Orlov was married. He was just the boss, and Fischerabel were his right and his left hand at once. Both hands were dirty.

XVIII.

But life is cruel, it separates even the best of friends. In 1938 the Spanish Civil War is ending, and Fischerabel and Orlov part ways. They check out of the Hotel Nacional in Madrid, where the entire operation was run, and travel—some by air, some by boat, still others by the submarine that carried the Spanish Gold Reserve, which was handed over to the Soviets by Juan Negrin, the Republican government's finance minister—in opposite directions. Orlov disappears into thin air. Fischerabel return to Moscow and continue to work for the old establishment, filing reports, training new recruits—the kind of thing that field men do when they are out of the field. In 1940, when Rudolph Abel gets transferred to the Far East, where trouble is brewing on the Mongolian border, he makes a wrong move, and gets killed. Then comes World War II. Throughout it Willie Fischer remains in Moscow, trains more recruits—this time perhaps

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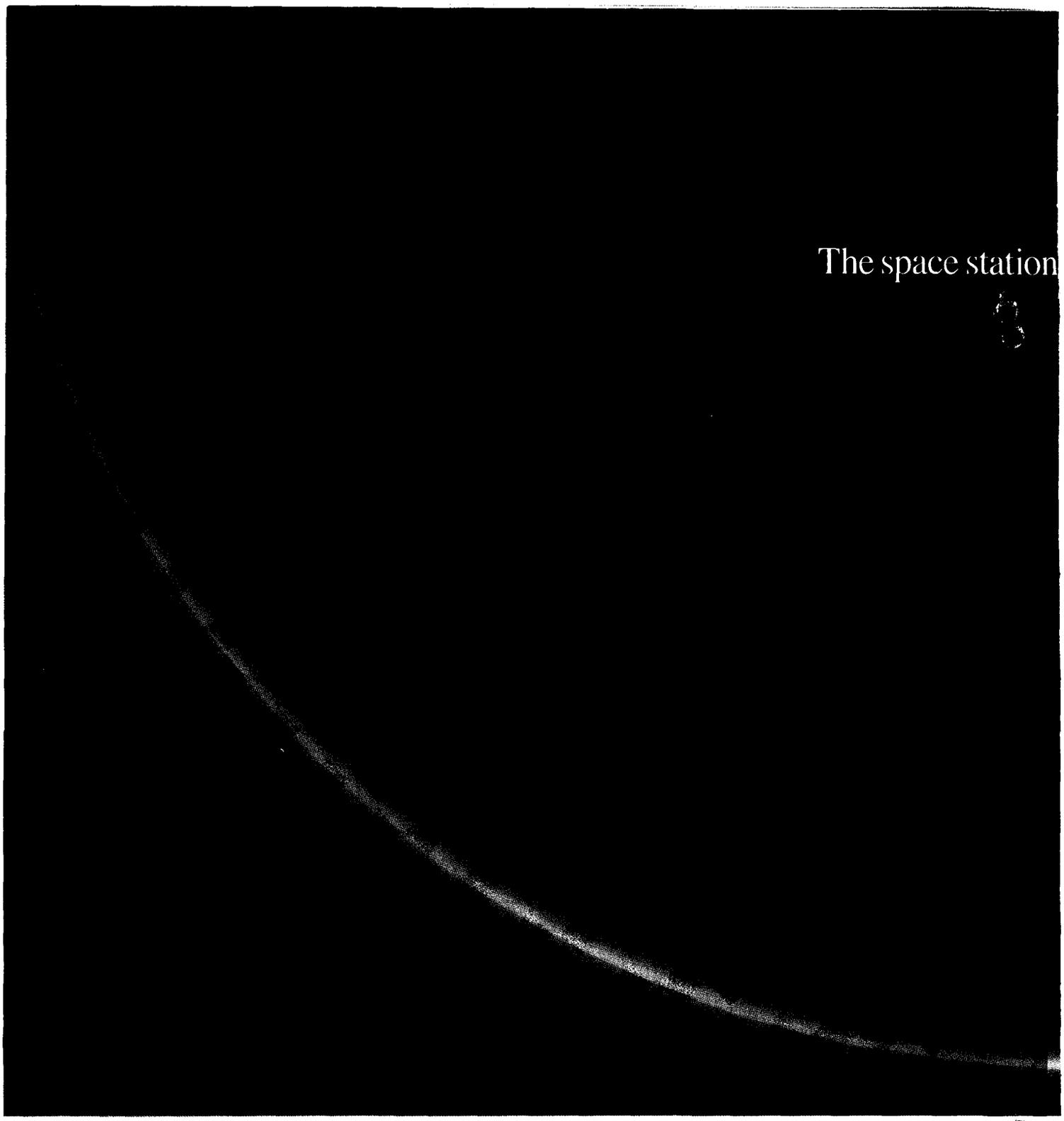

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Best of all, research on board the space station will increase our rate of discovery and invention in materials and life sciences.

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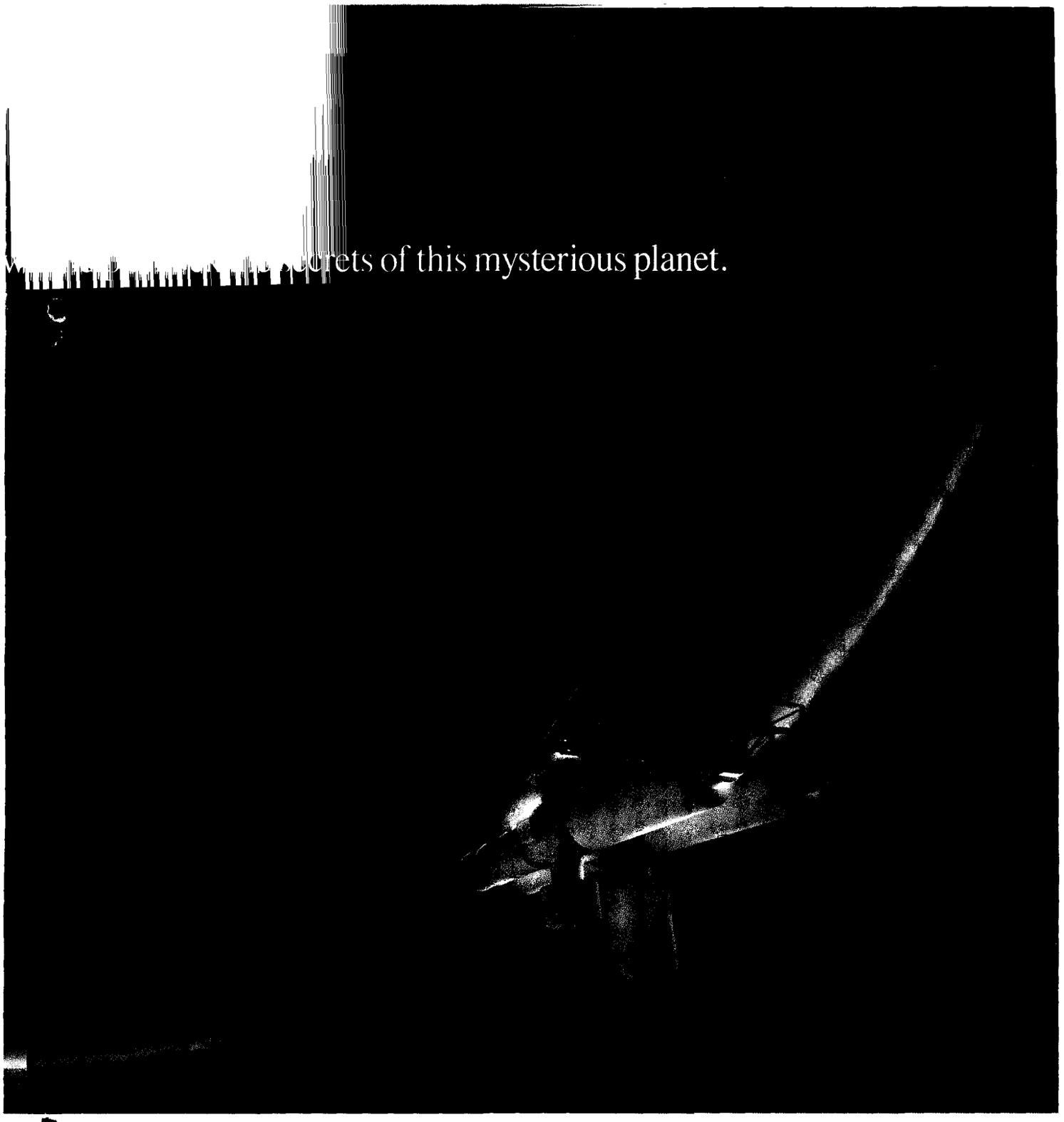

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with greater gusto, since German is his father tongue—but he generally feels fallen by the wayside, bypassed for promotion, aging. This fretful state of affairs ends only in Nineteen Faulty Ape, when he's suddenly taken out of mothballs and given a new assignment. "The kind of assignment," he remarks cryptically on the eve of his departure to one of his former sidekicks from the old Spanish days, "the kind of assignment that a field man's entire life is the preparation for." Then he takes off. The next time his pals hear of him is X years later when, nabbed by the feds in that Brooklyn apartment, good old Willie sings, "I am Colonel of the Red Army Rudolph Abel, and I demand . . ."

XIX.

Of the many virtues available to us, dear reader, patience is best known for being rewarded. In fact, patience is an integral part of every virtue. What's virtue without patience? Just good temper. In a certain line of work, however, that won't pay. It may, in fact, be deadly. A certain line of work requires patience, and a hell of a lot of it. Perhaps because it is the only virtue detectable in a certain line of work, those engaged in it zero in on patience with a vengeance. So bear with us, dear reader. Consider yourself a mole.

XX.

The twang of a guitar, the sound of a shot fired in a poorly lit alley. It's Spain, shortly before the end of the Civil War (not ending through neglect on the part of Orlov's good offices, of course, but in Moscow they may see things differently). On this night Orlov has been summoned to see a certain official from Moscow aboard a ship lying at anchor in Barcelona. As the head of Soviet intelligence in Spain, he reports only to Stalin's own secretariat: directly. Orlov senses a trap and runs. He grabs his wife, takes the elevator down, tells a bellboy in the lobby to get him a taxi. Cut. Panorama of the ragged Pyrenees, roar of a two-engine airplane. Cut. Next morning in Paris, sound of an accordion, panorama of, say, the Place de la Concorde. Cut. An office in the Soviet Embassy on the rue de Varennes. Stalin's whiskers above the door of a Mosler safe flung wide open; a pin-striped wrist with cuffs stuffing a satchel with French bank notes and files. Cut. Blackout.

XXI.

Sorry, no close-ups. Orlov's disappearing act offers none. Still, if one stares at the blackout intently enough, one can make out a letter. This letter is addressed to Comrade Stalin, and it says something to the effect that he, Orlov, now severs his links with godless communism and its hateful, criminal system; that he and his wife choose freedom, and should a single hair fall from the heads of their aging parents, who are still in the clutches of this system, then he, Orlov, will spill *urbi et orbi* all the dirty top secret beans in his possession. The letter goes into an envelope, the address on that envelope is that of the offices of *Le Monde*, or maybe *Figaro*. At any rate, it's in Paris. Then the pen dips into the ink pot again: another letter. This one is to Leon Trotsky, and it goes something like this: I, the undersigned, am a Russian merchant who just escaped with my life from the Soviet Union via Siberia to Japan. While in Moscow and staying in a hotel, I overheard, by pure chance, a conversation in the next room. The subject was an attempt on your life, and through the crack in the door I even managed to espy your would-be assassin. He is young, tall, and speaks perfect Spanish. I thought it my duty to warn you. The letter is signed with an alias, but Don Levin, the Trotsky scholar and biographer, has positively identified its author as Orlov, and, if I am not mistaken, the scholar has received Orlov's personal confirmation. This letter is postmarked Nagasaki and the address on it is in Mexico City. It, too, however, ends up in a local tabloid (*La Prensa Latina? El Pais?*), since Trotsky, still smarting from the second attempt on his life (in the course of which his American secretary was murdered by a would-be world-famous muralist—David Alfaro Siqueiros—with the assistance of a would-be world-famous, indeed a Nobel Prize-winning, poet, Pablo Neruda), habitually forwards all threats and warnings he receives to the press. And Orlov must be aware of this, if only because for the last three years he has been in the habit of perusing quite a few periodicals in Spanish. While having his coffee, say. In the lobby of the Nacional, or in his suite there on the sixth floor.

XXII.

Where he used to entertain all sorts of people. Including Ramon Mercader, Trotsky's third and successful assassin. Who was simply Orlov's employee, much the same as Fischerabel, working for the same outfit. So if Orlov really wanted to warn Trotsky, he could have told him a lot more about Ramon Mercader than that he was young, tall, handsome, and spoke perfect Spanish. Yet the reason for the second letter was not Trotsky, the reason was the first letter, whose addressee wasn't Stalin. To put it more neatly, the Stalin letter, printed in *Le Monde*, addressed the West, while the Trotsky letter, though it went literally to the Western Hemisphere, addressed the East. The purpose of the first was to win Orlov good standing abroad, preferably in the intelligence community. The second was a letter home, informing his pals in Moscow headquarters that he was not spilling the beans, though he could: about Mercader, for instance. So they, the pals, could go ahead with the Trotsky job if they cared to. (They did, though no tear should be shed, since Trotsky, who drowned the only genuine Russian Revolution that ever took place—the Kronstadt Uprising—in blood, wasn't any better than the spawn of hell who ordered his assassination. Stalin, after all, was an opportunist. Trotsky was an ideologue. The mere thought that they could have swapped places makes one wince.) Moreover, should the authorship of the second letter ever come to light, as it did in Don Levin's research, it could only enhance

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Orlov's credentials as a true anti-Stalinist. Which is precisely what he wasn't. He had no ideological or any other disagreement with Stalin. He was simply running for his dear life, so he threw the dogs a bone to munch on. They munched on it for a couple of decades.

XXIII.

Blackout. Time for the credits. Ten years ago an émigré Russian publishing house in France published a book called *A Hunter Upside Down*. The title suggests one of those cartoon puzzles in which you have to look for the hidden figures: hunters, rabbits, farmers, birds, and so on. The author's name was Victor Henkin. He was Willie Fischer's sidekick from the good old Spanish days, and the Fischerabel story is what the book is all about, although it aims to be an autobiography. Some of the Orlov tidbits also hail from there. The book should have been a hit, if only because people in the know on the longer side of the Atlantic still believed that they had Rudolph Abel. By the same token, they still believed that Orlov, who had joined them, truly worked for that side whose decorations one may see proudly displayed on his chest in one of Orlov's rare close-ups, in a book published with great fanfare in the States well after Orlov's death in 1972. But no fanfare for Henkin's book. When an American publisher tried to get a contract for it, he ran into a copyright wall. There were also some minor scandals over alleged plagiarism in the German or French edition, it was in the courts, and for all I know Henkin lost. Now he works for a radio station in Munich that broadcasts into Russia—almost the flip side of the job he had for donkey years at Radio Moscow broadcasting in French. Or else he is retired. A Russian émigré, with a highly checkered record.... Not trustworthy, presumably paranoid.... Living in the past, ill-tempered.... Still, he is free now, he's got the right papers. He can go to the Gare de Lyon, board a train, and just like fifty years ago, after a night-long journey, he can arrive in Madrid, the city of his youth and adventure. All he has to do is to cross the large station square and he'll be standing in front of the Nacional; he could do it with his eyes closed. Still with his eyes closed he can enter a lobby that teemed fifty years ago with Orlovs, Fischers, Abels, Hemingways, Philbys, Orwells, Mercaders, Malrauxs, Negrins, Erhenburgs, and lesser lights like himself: with all those who have taken part in our story thus far or to whom we, one way or another, owe credits. Should he open his eyes, however, he'll discover that the Nacional is closed. It's been closed, according to some—mostly the young—for the last ten years; according to others, for the last fifty. Neither the young nor the old seem to know who pays the property tax, but maybe in Spain they do things differently.

XXIV.

And in case you think, dear reader, that we've forgotten him, let's extract Kim Philby from the crowd in the lobby, and let's ask him what he's doing there. "I'm with the paper, actually," we'll hear. "Covering the war." Let's press him as to whose side he's on, and let's imagine that, just for an instant, he'll talk straight. "Switching at the moment. Orders." He may as well motion slightly upward with his chin, toward the sixth floor of the Nacional. For I am absolutely convinced that it was Orlov who told Kim Philby in 1937 in Madrid or thereabouts to change his tune in the *Times* from pro-Republican to pro-Franco, for reasons of deeper cover. If, as the story goes, Philby was meant to be a long shot aimed at the *sancta sanctorum* of British intelligence, he had better go pro-fascist. It's not that Orlov foresaw which way the Spanish show might go, though he could have had an inkling; he simply thought, or knew, that Philby should be played for keeps. And he could think this way, or know this, only if he were privy to the file that the Russians by then had on Philby, who was recruited in 1933, or to the actual recruitment of Philby. The first is certain, the second is possible. In any case Orlov knew Philby personally, which is what he tried to tell the hapless FBI man who interviewed him in 1944, in Iowa I think, where he then dwelled, having immigrated to the United States from Canada. At that point, it seems, Orlov was finally ready to spill the beans; but the FBI man paid no attention to the mention of some Englishman with a stutter who worked for the Soviet Union, which, on top of everything, was at that time an American ally. So Orlov decided not to press this any further, and Kim Philby headed for the stamp.

XXV.

With these beans still intact in his hippothalamus on the one hand, and on the other having penned a couple of novels filled with the standard field-man yarn, but of the Russian variety, Orlov was no doubt of some interest to the budding CIA in the late 1940s. I have no idea, dear reader, who approached whom: I haven't studied Orlov's life, or its available record. Not my line of work. I am not even an amateur; I am just piecing all these things together in my spare time, not out of curiosity even, but to quell the sensation of utter disgust caused by the sight of that literary paper's cover. Self-therapy, then, and who cares about sources so long as it works. At any rate, regardless of who approached whom, Orlov seems to have been retained by the CIA from the 1950s onward. Whether he was on the payroll or just free-lancing is hard to say; but to judge by his decorations, as well as by the marginal evidence of his subsequent penmanship, it's a fair assumption. Most likely, he was engaged by the agency in an advisory capacity; nowadays this sort of thing is called consultancy. A good question would be whether the fellows back in Moscow knew of his new affiliation. Assuming, for Orlov's sake, that he didn't notify them himself, for that would still be suicidal, and assuming that the newly born agency couldn't be penetrated—if only for the sake of definitions—the fellows in Moscow were in the dark. Still, they had reason to believe that Orlov was around, if only as an aspiring thriller writer. As they had no news of him for a couple of decades, they may have wondered. And when you wonder, you imagine the worst. In a certain line of work, it's only prudent. They might even have wanted to check.

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XXVI.

And they had the wherewithal. So they took it out of mothballs and put it in place. Still, they were in no hurry. Not until Nineteen Filthy Fine, that is. Then they suddenly felt pressed. And on Marchember Umpteenth, Willie Fischer gets himself arrested in Brooklyn, New York, by those FBI men and declares, *urbi et orbi*: I am Rudolph Abel. And the tabloids go ape, in the States and all over the place. And Orlov doesn't squeak. Evidently he doesn't want to see his old pal again.

XXVII.

What was so special about Nineteen Filthy Fine, you may ask, and why was it imperative now to check the state of the beans in Orlov's hippothalamus? Even if they were still all there, hadn't they gone stale and useless? And who says old pals must be seen? Well, dear reader, brace yourself for loony assertions. For now we are going to show you, in a big way, that we haven't forgotten our subject. Now we are cooking literally with oil.

XXVIII.

Contrary to popular demonology, the foreign policy of the Soviet Union was, from the beginning of its existence, always opportunistic. I am using this term in its literal, not its derogatory, sense. Opportunism is the core of any foreign policy, regardless of the degree of confidence a state may have in itself. It means the use of opportunity: objectively present, imagined, or created. For most of its sorry history, the Soviet Union remained a highly insecure customer, traumatized by the circumstances of its birth, its deportment vis-à-vis the rest of the world fluctuating between caution and hostility. (Nobody fitted the width of that margin better than Molotov, Stalin's foreign minister.) As a consequence, the Soviet Union could afford only objectively present opportunities. Which it seized, notably in 1939, grabbing the Baltic states and half of Poland, as offered to Stalin by Hitler, and in the final stages of the war, when the Soviet Union found itself in possession of Eastern Europe. As for the opportunities imagined—the 1928 march on Warsaw, the 1936-39 adventure in Spain, and the 1940 Finnish Campaign—the Soviet Union paid dearly for these flights of fancy (though in the case of Spain it was reimbursed with the country's gold reserve). The first to pay, of course, was the General Staff, almost entirely beheaded by 1941. Yet the worst consequence of all these fantasies, I suppose, was that the Red Army's performance against a handful of Finnish troops made Hitler's temptation to attack Russia absolutely irresistible. The real price for the pleasure of playing with imagined opportunities was the total number of divisions assigned to Operation Barbarossa.

XXIX.

Victory in the war didn't change Soviet foreign policy much, since the spoils of war hardly matched the gigantic human and industrial losses the war inflicted. The scale of the devastation was extraordinary; the main postwar cry was reconstruction. This was carried out mainly by means of stripping the conquered territories of their technology and transplanting it into the USSR. Psychologically satisfactory, this however could not put the nation ahead industrially. The country remained a second- or third-rate power, its only claim to consequence being its sheer size and its military machine. Formidable and state of the art as the latter tried to be, the comfort the nation could derive from it was largely of the narcissistic sort, given the cumulative strength of its supposed adversaries and the emergence of nuclear weapons. What really fell under the onslaught of that machine, however, was the Soviet Union's foreign policy—its options defined, as it were, by its legions. To this reversal of Clausewitz one must add the growing rigidity of a state apparatus petrified by the fear of personal responsibility and imbued with the notion that the first word and the last word on all matters, above all on matters of foreign policy, belonged to Stalin. Under the circumstances, diplomatic initiatives, let alone attempts at creating opportunities, were unthinkable. What's more, the distinction between a created opportunity and an imagined one can be galling. It takes a mind accustomed to the dynamics of a well-heeled economy (to the accumulation of wealth, surplus production, and so on) to tell one from another. If you are short on that sort of expertise, you may confuse the one thing for the other. And well into the 1950s, the Soviet Union was short on it. It still is.

XXX.

And yet in the late 1950s the Soviet Union undertakes something rather spectacular, something that leaves you with the sense that, with the death of Stalin in 1953, Soviet foreign policy comes to life. After the Suez debacle in the autumn of 1956, the USSR undertakes an unusually well-coordinated and well-sustained push toward the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. This departure is as sudden as it is successful. Its goal, as hindsight avails us, is control of the Middle East, or, more pointedly, of its oil fields. The logic behind this move is simple and fairly Marxist: whoever controls energy resources controls production. In other words, the idea is to bring the Western industrial democracies to their knees. Whether to do it directly, by sending troops into the region, or by proxy, by supporting the local Arab regimes and turning them pro-Soviet, is, for the moment, a matter of circumstance and logistics; the proxy option is obviously preferable. And initially this works: a number of Arab states in the region go pro-Soviet, and so fast that one may think that these societies were ripe for Communist ideology, or at least accustomed to that sort of discourse. They were not. The few existing CP cells in King Farouk's Egypt, for instance, were wiped out under Nasser entirely, their members turned into cellmates or dangled from the rope. An even greater Marxist dearth marked—still does—the rest of the Islamic world, east and west of Cairo: the culture of the Book won't abide another one, especially one written by a Jew. Still, the first Soviet steps in the region met with success, the degree of which could be explained only by the newcomer's recourse to some sort of network within those societies, and with access to all its levels. Such a network couldn't be of German origin (not even in Egypt), since Reinhard Gehlen, the postwar head of West German intelligence, sold his entire [redacted] cabinet in the late 1940s to the United States. Nor could it be French, who were a marginal presence in the region to begin with, and then fiercely loyal to France. That left the local pro-British element, presumably taking its cue—in the vacuum left by the master race's withdrawal—from some local resident (stationed, say, in Beirut). Out of nostalgia, perhaps, out of the hope for the Empire's return. At any rate, it certainly wasn't the novelty of the Russian ver-

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sion of the infidel that nearly delivered the region to the Soviets in the late 1950s; it was a created opportunity.

XXXI.

Imagine this blueprint on a drawing board somewhere in Moscow thirty-five or forty years ago. It says: there is a vacuum left in the Middle East by the British. Fill it up. Support new Arab leaders: one by one, or bundle them together into some sort of confederation, say, into a United Arab Republic or League. Give them arms, give them anything. Drive them into debt. Tell them that they can pay you back if they hike their oil prices. Tell them that they can be unreasonable about that, that you'll back them up all the way; and you've got nukes. In no time, the West cries uncle, the Arabs get rich, and you control the Arabs. You become top dog, as befits the first socialist country in the world. As for how to get your foot in the door, it's all taken care of. You'll get along with these guys just fine, they don't like Jews either.

XXXII.

And imagine this blueprint being not of your own manufacture. For it simply could not have been. In order to conceive of it, you would have to be acquainted with the region, and intimately so. You ought to know who is who there, what this sheikh or that colonel is up to, his pedigree and hang-ups. In Moscow and its vicinity, there is nobody with that sort of data. Furthermore, you ought to know about oil revenues, the market, its fluctuations, stocks, this or that industrial democracy's annual intake of crude, tankers' fleets, refineries, stuff like that. There is nobody acquainted with this sort of thing on your staff, or moonlighting elsewhere either. And even if to imagine that such a fellow existed, a doctrinaire Marxist and a bookworm, with the clearance to read Western periodicals—even if such a fellow existed, and came up with such a blueprint, he would have to have a godfather in the Politburo to place this blueprint on the drawing board; and placing it there would give that member of the Politburo an edge that his colleagues wouldn't tolerate for a split second. Ultimately this plan could not have been conceived by a Russian, if only because Russia herself has oil; actually plenty of it. You don't regard as a source of energy something you waste. Had it been homemade, this blueprint would never have seen the light of day. Besides, it's too damn close to an imagined opportunity. The very reason that it is on your drawing board, though, is that it has nothing to do with the native imagination. That alone should be enough to qualify it as a created opportunity. For it comes from without, and its main attraction is that it is foreign-made. To members of the Soviet Politburo in the 1950s, this blueprint was what blue jeans are to their kids. They liked it very much. Still, they wanted to check the label. And they had the wherewithal.

XXXIII.

And while they are checking the label, dear reader, let me give you something straight, without the author's interference. Harold Adrian Russell Philby, "Kim" to his chums in England and especially in Russia, where this nickname rang no Kipling bell, being instead a brand-new Soviet name, popular especially in the 1930s, since it was the acronym of Kommunisticzeskii Internatzional Molodezhi (Communist International of Youth), was born in Ambala, India, in—as the stamp rightly says—1912. His daddy was Harry St. John Philby, a great English Arabist and explorer who subsequently converted to Islam, and became an adviser to King Ibn Saud of guess which country. The boy was educated at Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read history and economics and was a member of the Apostles. After Cambridge he free-lanced for various London publications, and in this capacity he went in 1937 to Spain to cover the Civil War and later on was taken up by the *Times*, for which he covered the initial stages of World War II. That's essentially what was known about the 28-year-old man by 1940, when he was employed by MI6, the counterintelligence branch of the fabled British SIS, and given the job of handling anti-Communist counterespionage matters. Presumably at his own request. During the war years he moves rapidly through the ranks, gets stationed in Istanbul, and becomes, in 1946, the head of Soviet counterintelligence. That's a big job, which he abandons only three years later, having been posted as first secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, that is, as chief liaison officer between the SIS and the CIA, where, among other things, he becomes a close friend of James Angleton, the CIA's head of counterintelligence. On the whole, it is a marvelous career. The man is awarded the OBE for his wartime services, he is greatly respected by the foreign office and the gentlemen of the press, and is groomed to become the head of the SIS. That, essentially, is what was known to his peers and his superiors about this 39-year-old man in 1951, when something rather untoward occurs. Two of his old pals, way back from Cambridge days, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, turn out to be Soviet spies, and flee to the Soviet Union. What's worse, a suspicion lurks in the heads of people-in-the-know on both sides of the Atlantic that it was Philby who warned them off. He is investigated, nothing is proved, doubt persists, and he is asked to resign. Life is cruel, the best of pals can bring you down. Such was the verdict of many, including the Foreign Office. He resumes his journalistic career—after all, he is still in his 40s—but the inquiries continue. Some people just don't give up. In 1955 Harold Macmillan, then the British foreign secretary, in a statement before the Commons, fully exonerates Philby of any wrongdoing. His slate wiped clean, Philby obtains, through the Foreign Office's misty-eyed assistance, the job of foreign correspondent for *The Economist* and *The Observer* in Beirut, whereto he sails in 1956, never to see the chalk cliffs of Sussex again.

XXXIV.

It's three years later that the fellows in Moscow click their tongues admiring the blueprint. Still, they want to check the label. For what is a clean slate to some is the writing on the wall to others. They figure that the Brits couldn't get any goods on a Brit because they were searching the Brits; they were doomed because they were engaged in a tautology. For the job of a mole is to outsmart the natives. As for the Russian end—should they ever gain access to it, which is highly unlikely—it would reveal nothing either. The identity of a mole, especially a mole so highly placed, wouldn't be known even to the case officer running him, it would be only a code name or a bunch of digits at best. That's as much as even the most knowledgeable defector can tell you, not to mention the fact that he would be defecting straight into the arms of the SIS counterintelligence section, and guess who is in charge of that. The only two people who might know his identity would be the present Soviet head of counterintelligence, and that far no Brit could ever go, or the counterintelli-

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gence officer who recruited the man initially. A sergeant, by definition, is older than his recruit, and since we are talking here about the 1950s, that sergeant should by now be either dead or indeed running the whole Soviet counterintelligence show. Most likely though he is dead, since the best way to protect the recruit's identity is to kill the sergeant. Still, in 1933, when a 21-year-old Cambridge graduate was recruited, things were not as watertight as they are now in the 1950s, when we are checking the label, and the good old—no, dead—sergeant might have said something to his superior (who was presumably dead, too: those purges of the state security apparatus in the late 1930s were not for nothing) or had a witness to the recruitment, or the poor young witless recruit himself might have rubbed shoulders with somebody who later went bad. After all, his choice of pals is what brought him down, though for a while they delivered all the comings and goings of the Anglo-American Atomic Energy Commission. (Good flies on the wall they were, but now look at them coming here to roost!) Let bygones be bygones, of course; but if we are to carry out this blueprint, we need something tighter than an exoneration by Harold Macmillan—bless his heart—in Commons, we need complete immunity for our man against any whistle-blowers. No surprises, no voices from the past, no skeletons in the closet. So who are those guys he might have rubbed shoulders with before they went bad? Where are their death certificates?

XXXV.

And they can't find Orlov's. And Willie Fischer sings his world famous Abel lyric. And Orlov doesn't want to see his old pal. And they conclude that he is either dead or not suicidal. And so they move into the Middle East, into Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya; they seize the created opportunity. They shower new Arab leaders with planeloads and shiploads of military surplus, advisers, and whatnot; they drive those nations into debt. And the advisers advise the leaders to hike oil prices to pay them back. And the leaders do just that: by high margins and with impunity, backed by this new set of infidels with nukes. And the West starts to kowtow and cry "UN"—but that's just the first syllable of uncle. And now the faithful, the fidel and the infidel, hate the Jews together. It all works just like the man said it would.

XXXVI.

But life is cruel, and one day the new oil-producing pals get greedy. They create a cartel, OPEC by name, and start filling up their own coffers. They put the squeeze on the West, but not for our sake! They also quarrel among themselves. Anyhow, they get richer than their old masters, not to mention us. That wasn't in the blueprint. The architect of our Middle East policy, the son of King Ibn Saud's adviser, an observer and economist to boot, our great and unexposed—well, technically speaking—secret agent should have been able to foresee this turn of events! Thus far everything went according to the plan: he delivered, and now this. Well, he better tell us what to do next. Basically, we need him here now, on a day-to-day basis. Anyway, it's safer for him here in Moscow; fewer temptations as well. He can concentrate better. It ain't Beirut.

XXXVII.

It certainly was much colder. At least for the spy who came in from the warmth. At long last. Actually, exactly thirty years after he was recruited. Whatever that means, except that he is 51 years old now and has to start a new life. Which, after all, isn't that hard, since the local lads go out of their privileged ways to assist you; and besides, at 51 no life is that new, no country is that foreign. Especially if you have spied for that country all your adult life. And especially if you did it not for money, but out of conviction. So the place should be familiar to you, at least mentally. For it's the conviction that is your home, your ultimate comfort: you blow all your life savings on furnishing it. If the world around you is poor and colorless, then you stuff this place with all manner of mental candelabra and Persian carpets. If that world used to be rich in texture, then you'll settle for mental monochrome, for a few abstract chairs.

XXXVIII.

And, as we are on our last leg, dear suffering reader, let's get a bit anachronistic. There is a certain type of Englishman that appreciates frugality and inefficiency: the one who nods contentedly at a stalled elevator or at one boy being caned for another boy's prank. He recognizes botch and bungle the way one recognizes one's relatives. He recognizes himself in a peeling, wobbly railing, damp hotel sheets, slovenly trees in a soot-laden window, bad tobacco, the smelly carriage of a delayed train, bureaucratic obstacles, indecision and sloth, impotent shrugs; certainly in poorly cut serge clothes, in gray. So he loves Russia; mainly from a distance, as he cannot afford the trip, except perhaps later in life, in his [redacted]0s or 60s, when he retires. And he'd d[redacted] a lot for Russia, for his inefficient yet dramatic, soulful, Doctor Zhivago-like (the movie, not the book) Russia, where the twentieth century hasn't yet set its Goodyear tire, where his childhood still continues. He doesn't want his Russia to go American. He wants her to stay intense and awkward, in brown woolen stockings with broad pink garters: no nylons, and please no pantyhose. It is his equivalent of rough trade, of the working-class lads for whom his old Cambridge pals will be prowling London pubs for the rest of their lives. He is straight, though; and it's Russia for him, if it's not Germany or Austria.

XXXIX.

And if Russia is Communist, so much the better. Especially if it is 1933 and Germany is out of the question. And if somebody with a slight accent asks you to work for Russia, and you are just 21, you say yes, because it's unlike anything else, and it sounds subversive. If school teaches you anything, it is to belong to a party, or at least to a club, and to form a cell. The CP is just another Apostles, a sort of frat, and it preaches brotherhood. At any rate, you go for what your pals do, and to them "the world proletariat" conjures up rough trade on a grand scale. And in a while you hear that slight accent again, and you are asked to do a job—nothing big, though faintly foul. And you do it; and now the slight accent has goods on you. If he is smart, the next time he asks you to do something, he doesn't mention the world proletariat, he mentions Russia. Because you won't do it, say, for India, though India, technically speaking, is part of the world, not to mention the proletariat. Fifty years ago social fiction was still ethnocentric, and so were spies. More Chekhov for you, then; more of Constance Garnett's Tolstoy on the train ride to Spain, for it's the time. It is also the place. A bright young thing can sample that brotherhood here: its blood, lice, hope,

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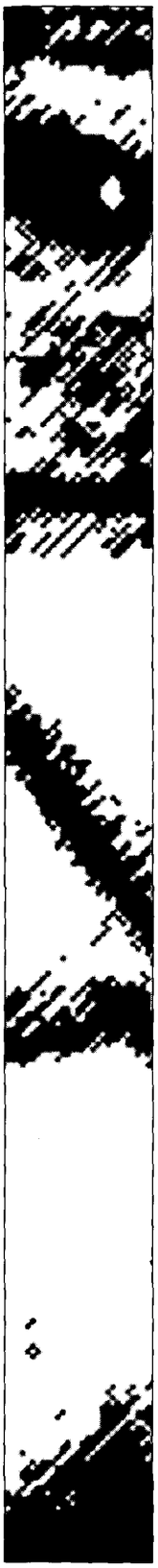
despair, defeat, apathy. Instead he hangs around in the lobby of the Nacional, sees some scum upstairs, and is told—to his secret relief, no doubt—to switch sides, for the sake of the greater good. That's how a bright young thing learns about the big picture, a.k.a. the future. The next time he hears the slight accent he knows it is a voice from the future. The accent will be different, since the first slightly accented throat has already been cut for the bright young thing's eventual safety; and if that throat had a beloved, she's already digging the permafrost of her twenty-five-year sentence in the Russian Far East, against the majestic snowy backdrop of a would-be Zhivago movie. Yet by the time the voice from the future enters your ear, there is WWII on your hands, Russia is an ally, and the SIS wants you to take part in the war effort. The big picture barges into view, and you ask for a Russian job. And since you are a gentleman, you are welcomed to it by senior gentlemen who can be identified as such, however, mainly by which door they push in a loo. Well, not even then.

XL.

So you know the country where you end up thirty years later at the ripe age of 51. Full of beans, no doubt, but past your prime. Ah, the chalk cliffs of Sussex! Ah, the accursed island! Ah, the whole Pax Britannica! They'll pay dearly for ruining such a brilliant career, for putting a clever man out to grass at the apogee of his ascent! A clever man knows how to get even with an empire: by using another empire. Never the twain shall meet. That's what makes a big picture grow bigger. Not a tooth for a tooth, but a mouthful for a tooth! Perhaps the greatest satisfaction of every spy is the thought that he is playing Fate, that it's he who pulls strings. Or else, cuts them. He fashions himself after Clotho, or perhaps after Arachne. A deus in machina that runs on petrol, he may not even catch the irony of being situated in Mazoutny Lane—well, not initially. At any rate, deus or deuce, controlling oil fields is a greater game than betraying the secrets of British intelligence to the Russians. There is not much left to betray in London anyway, whereas here the stakes are huge. The entire world order is at stake. Whoever wins here, it will be *his* victory. He, an observer and economist to boot, didn't read *Das Kapital* and *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* for nothing. Not to mention that the victory will be Russia's, since what can you expect of democracies: no resolve. Imagine Russia, his slovenly brown-woolen-stockings-cum-pink-garters-clad Russia, as the world's master, and not because of the nukes or the ballistic missiles only: imagine her, soulful and slothful, with all the Arabian peninsula's oil revenues under her pillow—uncertain, Chekhovian, anti-rationalist! A far better master (nay, mistress) of the world than his own Cartesian West, so easy to fool, himself being a good example. And should worse come to worst, should it be not Russia but some local, some sheikh or dictator, it's fine by him too. In fact, daddy would be proud of him if it should go all to the Saudis.



XLI.

And there it went, practically all of it. So much of it, in any case, that it should be the Saudis issuing this stamp, not the Russians. Well, perhaps one day they will. Or the Iraqis, or the Iranians. Whoever is to master the oil monopoly should issue the stamp. Ah, Muslims, Muslims! Where would they be now, were it not for the Soviet foreign policy of the 1960s and 1970s, that is, were it not for the late Mr. Philby? Imagine them unable to purchase a Kalishnikov, let alone a rocket launcher. They'd be unfit for the front page, they wouldn't make even the backdrop for a pack of camels.... Ah, but life is cruel, and beneficiaries don't remember their benefactors; nor, for that matter, do victims remember the villain. And perhaps they shouldn't. Perhaps the origins of good and bad are better off remaining obscured—especially the latter. Does it really matter what clouds the godhead: the concept of dialectical materialism or the Prophet's turban? Can we tell one from another? In the final analysis, there is no hierarchy between the cherry orchard and the triviality of the sand; it is only a matter of preference. For men, as well as for their money. Money, evidently, lacks a conscience of its own, and the jackpot goes to the desert simply out of its kinship for multitudes. On the whole, like a certain kind of Englishman, money has an eastward longing, if only because that realm is extremely populous. A secret agent, then, is but an early bird, a big bank's harbinger. And if he settles there, in the East, and goes native, helped along by local liquor, or a willing maiden, well, so what? Have Noah's pigeons returned? Ah, dear reader, imagine a letter sent today or in the near future from Moscow to Riyadh. What do you think it will contain? A birthday greeting, vacation plans, news of a loss in the family, complaints about the cold climate? No, more likely a request for money. Say, for an investment in the well-being of Riyadh's fellow Muslims on Soviet territory. And it will be written in English, this letter, and it won't be worth perlustration. A postmaster, perhaps, having glanced at its return address, may lift the crescent of the eyebrow obscured by his traditional headgear, but after a momentary hesitation he'll shove this envelope into an appropriate slot: an envelope with a Philby stamp on it.

XLII.

Aglum thought, nods the exhausted reader. But wouldn't things have come to this juncture anyway, even without our English friend's assistance? Sure they would have, given the so-called dynamics of the modern world, which means the population explosion and the industrial gluttony of the West. These two would suffice; no need for a third party, let alone for an individual agency. At best, our English friend just articulated what was in the air or, as it were, afoot. Other than that, he was utterly insignificant. Sooner or later this was bound to happen, Kim or no Kim, Russia or no Russia. Well, without Russia perhaps it would have taken a touch longer, but so what. Individuals are incidental, it's all economics, isn't it? In this sense, even if

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an individual exists, he doesn't. Sounds a bit solipsistic, in a Marxist way; but our English friend would be the first to appreciate that. After all, historical necessity was his motto, his credo, his occasional rebuke to pangs of conscience. And after that, for all the professional hazards of one's trade, a belief in the imminent triumph of one's cause is safe betting, isn't it? (What if your cause triumphs in your lifetime, eh?) At any rate, from the standpoint of historical necessity, our man was of no use, at best he was redundant. For the objective of history was to make the Arabs rich, the West poor, and the Russians bob and bubble in limbo. This is what the bottom line says in that true bel canto of necessity, and who is the author to argue with it? A penny, then, for our friend's sense of mission; but not much more for the author's flight of fancy either. Anyway, what are his sources?

XLIII.

"Sources?" shrugs the author contemptuously. Who needs them? Who can trust sources? And since when? And does the reader realize what he is getting into by suspecting his author of being wrong, not to mention by proving it? Aren't you afraid, dear reader, that your successful refutation of the author's little theory might boil down to an unescapable conclusion on your part that the dark brown substance in which you find yourself up to your nostrils in the world today is immanent, preordained on high, at the very least sponsored by Mother Nature? Do you really need that? Whereas the author aims to spare you this anguish by proving that the aforementioned substance is of human manufacture. In this respect, your author is a true humanist. No, dear reader, you don't need sources. Neither sources nor tributaries of defectors' evidence; not even electronic precipitation raining unto your lap from the satellite-studded heaven. With our sort of flow, all you need is an estuary, a mouth really; and beyond that a sea with the bottom line for a horizon. Well, that much you've already seen.

XLIV.

Nobody, though, knows the future. Least of all those who believe in historical determinism; and next to them, spies and journalists. Perhaps that's why the former often disguise themselves as the latter. Of course, when it comes to the future, any occupation is good cover. Still, information-gathering beats them all, since any bit of information, including a secret one, is generated by the past: almost by definition, information deals with faits accomplis. Be it a new bomb, a planned invasion, or a shift in policy, you can learn only about what has already happened, what has already taken place. The paradox of espionage is that the more you know about your adversary, the more your own development is stunted, since this knowledge forces you into trying to catch up with him, to thwart his efforts. He keeps you occupied, by altering your own priorities. The better your spies, therefore, the more you fall into dependence on what you learn. You are not acting any longer: you are reacting. This maroons you in the past, with little access to the present and none to the future. Well, not to a future of your own design, let alone your own making. Imagine the Soviets not stealing American atomic secrets and thus spending the last four decades with no nukes to brandish. It could have been a different country; not much more prosperous, perhaps, given the doctrine, but at least the fiasco that we have recently witnessed might have occurred much earlier. If worse came to worst, they might have built a viable version of their socialism. But when you steal something, the catch possesses you, or at least your faculties. Considering the industry of our English friend and his pals, it went far beyond faculties; both hands of their Russian fence were, for quite some time, too busy to build socialism, they were hoarding goods. It could be argued that by betraying the Empire in such volume, the boys in fact served the Empire in a far more substantial manner than its most ardent standard-bearers. For the wealth of secret intelligence passed to the Soviets by the Cambridge class of 1931 mesmerized its recipients to the point of making at least their foreign policy thoroughly contingent on the harvest yielded by their own plants. For the men in Moscow Center, it's been like reading the Sunday papers non-stop seven days a week instead of doing the dishes or taking the kids to the zoo.

XLV.

So you can't say it was all in vain, dear reader, can you? Even though you may be as tired of the subject as the author himself. Let's claim fatigue, dear reader, and reach no conclusion, and spare ourselves the distrust, not to say the acrimony. On the whole, there is nothing wrong with intricacy of thought except that it's always achieved at the expense of thought's depth. Let's get into your Japanese Toyota, which doesn't consume a lot of the Arab oil-product, and go for a meal. Chinese? Vietnamese? Thai? Indian? Mexican? Hungarian? Polish? The more we bungle abroad, the more varied our diet. Spanish? Greek? French? Italian? Perhaps the only good thing about the dead spies was that they had a choice. But as I write this, the news comes over the wireless that the Soviet Union is no more. Armenian, then? Uzbek? Kazakh? Estonian? For some reason, we don't feel like eating at home tonight. We don't want to eat English.

XLVI.

Why should one bother so much about dead spies? Why can't one contain the repulsion that rises at the sight of a literary magazine's cover? Isn't this an overreaction? What's so new about someone's belief that a just society exists elsewhere, so special about this old Rousseauist lunacy, enacted or not? Every epoch and every generation is entitled to its own utopia, and so was Philby's. Surely the ability to cling to that sort of garbage beyond the age of down payment (not to mention the age of retirement) is puzzling; but one can easily put this down to temperament or to some organic disorder. A Catholic, a lapsed Catholic especially, can appreciate the predicament, and make a meal out of it if he is a writer; and so can a heathen. Or did I feel queasy simply because of the violation of scale, because of the printing enlargement of something small, a stamp really, as a result of which the perforation line takes on the dimension of a cloth fringe: a hanky's, a pillowcase's, a bedspread's, a petticoat's? Maybe I have a problem with fringed linen—a childhood trauma again? The day was hot and for a moment it felt like the enlargement of the stamp on the magazine's cover would go on and on, and envelop Belsize Park, Hampstead, and keep growing, larger and larger. A vision, you know. Too much reading of surrealist poets. Or else too many placards with the Politburo members' faces on the old retina—and the man on the stamp looks like one of them, for all his resemblances to Alec Guinness and

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Trevor Howard. Plus, of course, the Cyrillic ... enough to get dizzy. But it wasn't like that. There was no vision. There was just a face, of the kind you wouldn't pay attention to were it not for the caption, which, apart from anything else, was in Cyrillic. At that moment I regretted that I knew Russian. I stood there groping for an English word to shield my wits from the familiarity that the Cyrillic letters exuded. As is often the case with mongrels, I couldn't come up with the right word instantly, and so I turned and left the store. I only remembered the word well outside, but because of what it was, I couldn't get myself back to the store to buy the issue. The word was "treachery."

XLVII.

A wonderful word, that. It creaks like a board laid over a chasm. Onomatopoeically, it beats ethics. It has all the euphony of a taboo. For the ultimate boundary of a tribe is its language. If a word doesn't stop you, then a tribe isn't yours. Its vowels and its sibilants don't trigger your instincts, don't send your nerve cells into revulsion, don't make you wince. Which is to say, your command of this tribe's language is just a matter of mimicry. Which, in turn, points at your belonging to a different evolutionary order. Sublingual or supralingual, at least as regards the language that contains the word "treachery." Which is to prevent the sudden reversal of a bone to jelly. Which is to say, evolution never ends: it still continues. *The Origin of Species* ain't the end of the road; at best a milestone. Which is to say, not all people are people. Might as well add this stamp to the Shells and Mollusks series. It's still a seabed.

XLVIII.

You can only enlarge a stamp, you can't reduce it. That is, you can but reduction will serve no purpose. That is the self-defense of small items, or, if you will, their raison d'être. They can only be enlarged. That is, if you are in the graphics department of a literary paper of humble strikebreaking origins. "Blow it up," says the editor, and you cheerfully trot off to the lab. Can't reduce it, can you? Simply wouldn't cross your mind. Nowadays just push a button, and it either grows or shrinks. To life-size, or to the size of a louse. Push it once more, and the louse is gone. Extinct. Not what the editor asked for, though. He wants it life-size: large. The size of his fantasy, if not his dilemma. "Would you buy this man a drink or shake hands with him?" The old English pickle, except now it's grown chic, with perhaps a touch of retro to it. Ah, these days you push a button, and the whole mental swamp gets heaving and gurgling, from Pas de Calais to the Bering Strait, from the 1930s onward. For that's what history is for the generation currently active: for lapsed Catholics, editors in chief, and the like. For nowadays everything is chic and retro: this isn't the fin de siècle for nothing. There is little to look forward to save your bank statement. Whom would you spy for nowadays if you had access to secret information, if you still ached to defy your class or your country? For the Arabs? For the Japanese? Whose plant, let alone mole, could you be? The village has gone truly global; there is a dearth of allegiance, a dearth of affinity. Ay, you can't betray Europe to Asia any longer, nor, I'm afraid, the other way around. It's goodbye to conviction, goodbye to the good old godless communism. From now on, it's all nostalgia for you, old boy, all retro. From your baggy pants to the matte black of your video, stereo, or dashboard echoing the burnished steel of a gun barrel. That's about how radical, how chic it's going to be: in Europe, but in Asia too. So go ahead, blow up that louse from the 1950s, for reducing it might rob you of your emotional history: What would you be without that, without a big-time traitor never caught and never recanting in your past? Just a cipher in tax bracket hell, not dissimilar to that of the old wretch when he still drew his salary in pounds. Go ahead and blow it up; pity it can't be made three-dimensional. Pity, too, that you have no idea, as you are pressing "enlarge," that in less than three weeks the whole thing on whose behalf your man toiled all his life will go bust.

XLIX.

In a dream. A cross between a meadow and a communal garden somewhere in Kensington, with a fountain or a statue in the middle of it. A sculpture, anyway. Modern, but not very modern. Abstract, with a big hole in the center and a few strings across it: like a guitar but less feminine. Gray. Sort of like by Barbara Hepworth, but made of discarded thoughts and unfinished sentences. Lacelike. On the plinth there is an inscription: "To Beloved Spider. Grateful Cobwebs."

L.

Twangs of balalaika, the crackle of atmospherics. A hand fiddling with an eye-blinking wireless. It's Moscow, Russia, anytime between 1963 and 1988. More atmospherics and balalaika. Then the first bars of Lilliburlero and an upright female voice: "This is the BBC World Service. The news. Read to you by ..." In her 30s, perhaps. Well-scrubbed face, almost no makeup. A chiffon blouse. White. And a cardigan. Most likely beige, the tea-cum-milk color. A broadcloth skirt, knee-high. Black or dark blue, like the evening sky outside. Or maybe it's gray; but knee-high. Knee-high knee-high knee-high. And then there is a slip. Oh my oh my oh my. Another Boeing is blown up in a desert. Pol Pot, Phnom Penh. Mister—a split-second pause—Mugabe. Knee-high. Main thing, the lace. Fragile and intricate like circumlocution. Minuscule dotty flowers. That never see the light of day. And that's why they are so white. Oh blast! Sihanouk, Pinochet, Rudi Deutchke. Chile, Chile, Chile, Chile. Dotty little pansies smothered to death by light-brown tights from a shop in Islington. That's what the world came down to. From the step-by-step approach, from the silks/flesh/garter/bingo system to the either/or of pantyhose. Détente, sygint, ICBMs. New tricks but the dog's too old. For these, and for the old ones too. Well, looks like. And going to end up here after all. Pity. Can't win them all, can you? Another whiskey then. "The main points again ..." In her 30s, if you ask me, and on the plump side. Dinnertime anyway. Methuselah fancies dotty little pansies. Methuselah fancies ... All that matters in this life is that cobwebs outlive the spider. How does that thingummy—Tyutchev's! Tyutchev is the name—lyric go?

> We are not given to appraise
> In whom or how our word may live on.
> And we are vouchsafed oblivion
> The way we once were given grace.

Dushen'ka! Dushen'ka! What's for dinner? "Ah, dahrleeng, I thought we would eat English tonight. Boiled beef." •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Fun and Fumble

It's hard to imagine a mediocre performance of farce. Of tragedy or comedy, yes; but farce either succeeds or it flops.

Which is why it's so pleasant to report that **Noises Off** (Touchstone) succeeds. It's a further pleasure to note that the director was Peter Bogdanovich, whose previous attempt in this field, *What's Up, Doc?*, was dismal and whose entire recent output has been dim. Everything is knitted up nicely in *Noises Off*, and we get the double reward we want from farce: we laugh a lot, even if at a pretty basic level, and we watch an intricate design spinning out neatly.

The original play, by the English writer Michael Frayn, was amusing in its Broadway production, but the film is funnier. The film cast is superior, and, as is rarely the case, the opening up of the original—simply to include more places for action—brightens the plot.

Marty Kaplan did the nimble adaptation and makes the cinematic most of it. The story is about the rehearsal and performance of a sexy English farce. Originally it was set in an English provincial rep theater; here it's transposed to America with American actors rehearsing and performing the English farce-within-a-farce in various cities en route to Broadway. The central gimmick is the intersectings of the actors' personal lives with the rehearsals and performances of their play. It's not a spanking new idea, but Frayn used it cleverly and Kaplan pounces on every chance to extend it. For instance—a moment that was impossible in the theater—the farce is playing a Miami Beach matinee on its way to New York. Amid the turmoil backstage, announcements to the audience over the p.a. system get jumbled. One announcement says that the performance will begin in three minutes, and all the elderly gents in the audience rise and head for the men's room. Immediately there's an announcement saying it will begin in one minute, and the gents have to hurry back to their seats.

The internal farce is called *Nothing On* and is about two couples, each of which thinks a certain country house is empty and wants to use the place for secret lovemaking. There are lots of doors opening and closing just in the nick of time, of course, and a young woman in her undies. Two of the actors in the farce are embroiled in a backstage quarrel, the director is entangled with the (female) stage manager, an old character actor is deaf and, if he can manage it, drunk. The scrambling of the internal and the embracing farces gets worse and worse—thus more comically hectic—as the tour goes on.

The director of the troupe is done by Michael Caine and is therefore done smashingly. This man is amazing. Apparently he can play anything. He's done a lot of comedy, some of it fairly broad (*Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, for instance), but this is the first time (I think) he has done anything so committedly kinetic. His agility, his control, his security in the jagged turns of motion and speech are delightful. Good comedians are not always good farceurs. Rex Harrison was the most scintillating comedian of his day, but his performance in *A Flea in Her Ear* was dreadful just because he couldn't, or wouldn't, *move* quickly enough. Caine can and does.

Carol Burnett, playing the maid in *Nothing On*, slips expertly into and out of cockney as she slips into and out of the role, always with the air of a seasoned utility player who has seen better days and wants to be sure you know it. John Ritter and Nicollette Sheridan are nervously eager as the younger pair of would-be lovers in the inside play, and Ritter wheels and double-deals smartly behind the scenes. The older pair in *Nothing On* are a husband and wife stealthily returned to England from Spain and very edgy because the Inland Revenue would soak them if it knew they were back. (Everyone in farce needs something to harry him or her and to tickle us.) Marilu Henner suffices as the wife, and—I can hardly believe this as I type it—Christopher Reeves, old cement-block Superman himself, is limber as the husband and is appealingly ridiculous backstage as the actor who plays the husband. Julie Hagerty and Mark Linn-Baker flitter in and out as stage manager and general aide, and dear Denholm Elliott tops the mix as the old stager who plays a blithe burglar breaking into what he thinks is an empty house.

Like trapeze acrobats, farce actors put their lives trustingly in one another's hands—and the director's—more than they do in other genres. In film, the risk is even greater because a cinematographer and an editor intervene between actor and audience. The cast of *Noises*

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Daughters of the Dust. *On the Sea Islands off Georgia in 1902, a black family decides to move north. Julie Dash, a black writer-director, makes a lovely debut with this somewhat overlong but moving visual ballad. (Reviewed 2/20/92)* **Howards End.** *If this adaptation did no more than bring us the magnificent acting of Vanessa Redgrave, Emma Thompson, and Anthony Hopkins, it would be welcome. But there's much, much pleasure besides. (3/23/92)* **JFK.** *Factually thin, but gripping and unforgettable. If you like, put that remark the other way 'round. (1/27/92)* **Othello.** *This newly minted print of the 1952 film is notable, since it's by Orson Welles. But as Shakespeare's tragedy, it collapses inward because of Welles's tenuous Moor. (3/9/92)* **—SK**

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Off has not been betrayed, by one another or by others. Tim Suhrstedt has shot the film excellently, under Bogdanovich's guidance, often with really clever use of close foreground figures and relevant background ones. See, for example, Elliott's first appearance. And Lisa Day, the editor, has fulfilled (I assume) the director's concept: rendering the whole film as a flood of currents just barely missing one another as they rush by.

The film seems a touch too long, but length is not the real problem. The dynamics that are set in motion at the beginning—the last rehearsal in Des Moines before the opening there—swell to push the film from farce into fantasy. In that first long segment, the weaving of backstage problems and onstage antics is credible and makes us grin with recognition beneath our laughter. As the tour progresses, the antics begin to strain belief. The pratfalls and missed cues, the door handles coming off onstage, the pranks backstage still nudge us in the ribs, but the grin of recognition fades a bit.

Still, *Noises Off* is a rare commodity: a big bundle of farcical energy tied up with virtuoso glitter.

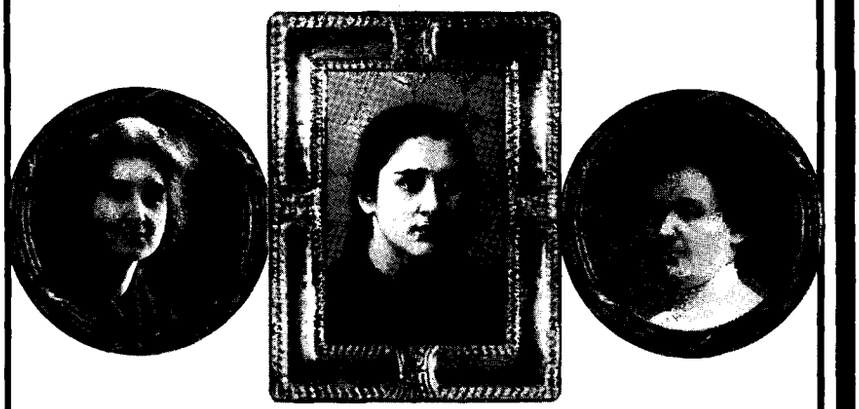
Woody Allen's warmest admirers may be the ones who will want to forget his new film most quickly. **Shadows and Fog** is the flip side of creative freedom. All serious filmmakers want the power to make films as they choose; Allen is one of the few who have that power. *Shadows and Fog* exemplifies the worst that can happen when a good filmmaker (which Allen has become) gets his unsupervised way.

An unnamed country. At the beginning a dream, in fogbound narrow nighttime streets, through which a strangler prowls. This dream, accompanied by tunes from *The Threepenny Opera*, sets the tone of what follows, in black and white. The dreamer is Allen, who wakes with a start as friends pound on his door and ask him to come and help them catch the strangler.

Into these streets, reminiscent of many Jack the Ripper films, goes Allen's sniveling Jewish schnook, here named Kleinman. (Little man, in case we're missing the point.) Various segments take place with and without him—in a circus, a brothel, a medical examiner's lab. The connection between the segments is thin, the point of the picture nonexistent. It doesn't even conclude: it merely stops on a note of pompous, because unearned, ambiguity.

I shudder to think of what film journals will publish about this unredeemed mess. Allen's stock character in this quasi-Victorian atmosphere signifies

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS



by Elena Bonner

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"A compelling blend of the personal and political

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"There are the kind of wonderful descriptions of summer and winter pleasures that we've come to expect of Russian memoirs—ice skating, gathering wild strawberries and mushrooms in the summer forest."
—CONSTANCE CASEY, Los Angeles Times

Just published by Knopf

Photos courtesy Elena Bonner

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that murder threatened and still threatens Jews? Life is a circus? Life is a brothel? Life is a circus *and* a brothel, wrapped in the fog of mystery? I can hear the word processors humming in every college town in America. (They've already begun in France, where the film had its premiere.)

Allen has made better and better films in recent years, which are always improved when he isn't in them. But *Shadows and Fog*, a title too plainly meant to echo Resnais's *Night and Fog*, is a willful disaster. •

Venus in Robes

BY MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

Sex and Reason by Richard Posner

(Harvard University Press, 458 pp., $29.95)

THE STATUE: My experience is that one's pleasures don't bear thinking about.
DON JUAN: That is why intellect is so unpopular.

—Shaw, *Don Juan in Hell*

Sex is ubiquitous in American courts, as it is in American life. Judges must deal with it in civil, criminal, and constitutional cases of many kinds; they are called upon to concern themselves with topics such as prostitution, homosexuality, contraception, nudity, child abuse, and erotic art. And yet, as Richard Posner rightly observes, judges often know very little about such topics. Proceeding on the assumption that sexual matters are ahistorical and "natural," and therefore sufficiently understood by simply consulting one's own intuitions, they approach these matters, all too often, with little historical or scientific learning, and with a personal experience that is likely, as Posner notes, to be somewhat narrow and uniform, given the effectiveness with which the background checking of judges weeds out members of sexual minorities. Thus, in deeply important human matters, we all too often find opinions that combine naïveté with the puritanism and the moralism that are such a large part of the American cultural heritage.

Consider, for example, the opinions in *Bowers* v. *Hardwick* (1986), the case in which the Supreme Court denied that a gay man, arrested in his own bedroom while having oral sex with another man, could legitimately claim that the Georgia sodomy law under which he was arrested violated a fundamental personal liberty, in connection with the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The case bore, on its surface, a very close relationship to other privacy cases (dealing with contraception, abortion, and the use of pornographic materials in the home) in which the Supreme Court had upheld the rights of individuals to regulate their sexual conduct by their own choice.

It also invited comparison to earlier cases in which laws forbidding miscegenation had been struck down as violations of both the due process clause and the equal protection clause: for miscegenation in the South a few decades ago, like homosexual conduct in Georgia today, was highly unpopular, and not likely to seem to most citizens the sort of thing to which individuals had a fundamental right "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty." And yet the Court had ruled that the Lovings (the remarkably named interracial couple) did in fact have such a right. For, the ruling held, miscegenation was a species of a genus—choice of one's own marital partner—that was protected, as a genus, by the Constitution, whether one liked all of its species or not. The same could have been said for homosexual sex acts in *Bowers*. It was not.

One would have expected the judges deciding such a complex and delicate case to have investigated the phenomenon of homosexuality very thoroughly, finding out what history and science have to say about it, and considering in some depth the lives of homosexuals in American society. None of this happened. The justices spoke in vague and highly inaccurate terms of a general condemnation of homosexual conduct stretching back to "ancient roots." But in fact their scanty references to the ancient pagan world were largely inaccurate, and even their picture of the history of Christian views on the topic was highly misleading. Nor did they do better when thinking about the way of life of a gay man in America—for they managed to dismiss without argument the notion that what was at stake for Michael Hardwick in choosing a sexual partner bore any relation at all to any of the Court's previous cases. Thus, as Justice Blackmun observed in his eloquent dissenting opinion, they all too quickly avoided asking whether there was not indeed a generic right to sexual choice that Hardwick, as much as "straight" Americans, enjoyed; nor did they even reach the point of asking whether the case could be construed as having an equal protection aspect, as Blackmun suggested it did.

The opinions in *Bowers* have drawn a lot of criticism, but the ignorance that they display is not unusual. One could also cite, for example, the opinion of Judge Robert Bork in the case of *Dronenberg* v. *Zeck*, involving homosexuals in the military. Again without any argument at all, and without any evidence of interest in learning and research, Bork simply asserted that the presence of gays in the services will lead to problems of sexual harassment in the workplace—never pausing to wonder whether this problem does not obtain similarly between males and females as well, whether gays are any more likely to harass their fellow workers than straights, whether all such problems could not best be dealt with by effective regulations governing sexual harassment, rather than by the exclusion of an entire class of qualified persons from the services. And one could also cite the recent District Court ruling by Judge Oliver Gasch in *Steffan* v. *Cheney*, the case of the talented midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy who was forced to withdraw shortly before graduation because he admitted to a homosexual orientation (though not to homosexual conduct). Without citing any of the pertinent literature on the topic, Gasch simply asserted that homosexual orientation is a mutable behavioral choice and that homosexuals are not disadvantaged with respect to political power in American society—all this in order to establish that homosexuals do not constitute a "suspect class" for the purposes of the equal protection clause.

I have focused on cases involving homosexuality since these are a rich repository of judicial bias and ignorance, but one could find many similarly unargued and insubstantial opinions in cases pertaining to other sexual matters. Prejudice, a lack of curiosity, flawed logic: all of these are depressingly common when judges confront the complexities of sex.

Posner wishes to alter this situation. A judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, as well as one of the most distinguished and prolific legal thinkers of his generation, he is well

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known for opinions that combine broad erudition with clear argument and eloquent, pungent writing. Where sexual matters are concerned, these virtues are combined, in the opinions he has written to date, with a refreshing lack of cant and a passionate concern for artistic liberty of expression.

His most important opinion—recently overturned by the Supreme Court—held unconstitutional, on First Amendment grounds, an Indiana statute that banned nude dancing. Defending the right of the striptease dancers of the Kitty Kat Lounge to keep their nipples uncovered, Posner wrote a learned (and witty) disquisition on the expressive properties of the dance, on the role of the erotic in the history of dance, on expression in the verbal and non-verbal artistic media, on the relationship between "high" and popular culture, and on the limitations of American moralism. He concludes:

> The true reason I think for wanting to exclude striptease dancing from the protection of the First Amendment is not any of the lawyers' classification games that I have been discussing.... It is a feeling that the proposition, "the First Amendment forbids the State of Indiana to require striptease dancers to cover their nipples," is ridiculous. It strikes judges as ridiculous in part because most of us are either middle-aged or elderly men, in part because we tend to be snooty about popular culture ... in part because we are Americans—which means that we have been raised in a culture in which puritanism, philistinism, and promiscuity are complexly and often incongruously interwoven.... But the element of the ridiculous is not all on one side. Censorship of erotica is pretty ridiculous too. What kind of people make a career of checking to see whether the covering of a woman's nipples is fully opaque, as the statute requires? (These statutes are full of absurd locutions, such as: "'Wholly or substantially exposed to public view,' as it pertains to breasts, shall mean ...").... Most of us do not admire the Islamic clergy for their meticulous insistence on modesty in female dress. Many of us do not admire busybodies who want to bring the force of law down on the heads of adults whose harmless private pleasures the busybodies find revolting. The history of censorship is a history of folly and cruelty.

(It is worth reflecting, incidentally, on what might be made of this one paragraph alone in a Supreme Court confirmation hearing. If the confirmation process has evolved in a way that excludes a provocative and brilliant figure such as Posner, but gives us people who either have no opinions or are willing to deny the opinions they have, we are much the worse.)

Out of Posner's dissatisfaction with judicial opinions in cases such as *Bowers* (of which he is highly critical) came this extraordinary book. It is an ambitious and complex undertaking and really has three distinct goals. Its first and modest goal is to provide judges (and others) with information and arguments—historical, cross-cultural, scientific—on sexual matters likely to come before the courts. Its second goal, far more ambitious, is to provide a comprehensive explanatory theory of sexual behavior, drawing both on economics and on evolutionary biology. Its third goal is to advance a normative theory of sexual legislation that is "libertarian," defending the rights of individuals to regulate their sexual conduct by their own lights except in those cases where it can be shown to cause harm to or to infringe on the rights of others.

How are these goals connected? It seems important to ask this question at the start, since Posner pursues the first and the third with far greater success than the second. And readers of Posner's previous work will have another reason to press the question. For Posner is one of the leading defenders of the thesis that judicial reasoning, properly understood, is really like economic reasoning, that the procedure of judges in

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torts and contracts, and indeed in constitutional law as well, is actually reasoning that seeks to maximize society's wealth. He advances this thesis as a descriptive thesis (seeing things this way will help us to understand what judges actually do, though they use other language) *and* as a normative thesis (when judges do not proceed in this way, they are reasoning badly).

By appeal to the normative thesis, he has, in *The Economics of Justice* (1981), criticized the privacy jurisprudence of the Supreme Court as "topsy-turvy," suggesting that the economic meaning of privacy is "profitable secrecy"; a judge who proceeds rationally will build up protections for, say, industrial secrecy, while being far less concerned about the unprofitable privacy of the bedroom. And he has shocked his readers by trying out economic reasoning in the sensitive areas of surrogate motherhood (where he called for a "thriving market in babies") and even rape (where he speculated about whether the special pleasure derived by the rapist from the nonconsensual nature of his act is or is not outweighed by the woman's loss in property rights in her body). Posner defends this apparently crude way of looking at things by asserting, repeatedly, the extremely controversial thesis that whenever individuals (judges or anyone else) are thinking rationally, they are seeking to maximize their satisfactions: so, if we are to give individuals (including women) credit for rationality, we had better see how we can cast their reasoning in this "economic" form.

In his economic mode, Posner has struck many of his readers as dogmatic and quite insensitive to the history and the complexity of human phenomena. In his recent book, the ambitious *The Problems of Jurisprudence* (1990), he seemed to waver about whether the economic approach provides a sufficient account of judging, and even of rationality. In any event, in none of his judicial opinions in the area of sexual conduct is there the slightest mention of economic notions, or even of cost benefit analysis. These opinions display a sensitivity and a flexibility that were notably lacking in some of his earlier theoretical writing. All of this gives ample reason for Posner's readers to wonder about the role played by economic theorizing in his current account of judicial reasoning about sex.

All three of Posner's projects in this book are connected by an opposition to puritanism and to simple moralism, and by his closely related view that ethical norms in matters of sex are not "natural" at all, but are constructed by societies in different ways. This anti-puritanism and anti-naturalism support Posner's determination to look to other times and other places for a more comprehensive understanding of human sexuality than a scrutiny of contemporary American intuitions might yield. And all this, in turn, supports his "hands-off" libertarian stance in areas such as homosexuality (where he holds that *Bowers* was wrongly decided), abortion (where he defends the general outcome in *Roe*, if not all the reasoning), and erotic art (where he wishes to give all expressive material full First Amendment protection, whether its content is political or not, propositional or not).

The informational and historical part of Posner's book is in many respects its most successful. Although the task of providing, in 100 pages of text, a short version of what judges ought to know about this topic is a daunting one, Posner, with his broad and accurate erudition, his curiosity and wit, does it remarkably well. He draws on the findings of anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, classical scholarship, and cultural history; and although the historical account is thin on material outside the Western tradition, it ranges very widely over times and places within that tradition.

Posner is especially interested in the ancient Greek world, and in analyses of ancient sexuality inspired by Foucault and the "social constructionists." The imaginary judges to whom this segment of the book is addressed would learn from even a cursory study of its contents that sexual categories and normative judgments about those categories are far more various than a modern American perspective might lead one to suppose. He or she would learn, for example, that in ancient Greece the fundamental distinction of sexual roles was between the active partner and the passive partner in the sexual act. For the active partner, the gender of the passive object was a matter of relative indifference. Thus the category of the "homosexual" as we know it—an individual who has an abiding preference for partners of a certain gender, regardless of the distinction between activity and passivity—did not really exist in that society. And in other ways, too, Posner is very good at showing the great diversity of attitudes that respectable societies have taken about many highly charged sexual topics, at setting contemporary America in perspective, among the cultures of the world, as a society marked by a singular combination of heterogeneity, puritanism, and "machismo."

The dominant position of the book's historical section is "social-constructionist," that is, it adopts the view that sexual norms do not derive from permanent and immutable laws of nature, but are devised by society and tradition. But Posner then goes on to defend as the best explanatory theory of human sexual behavior a theory that combines evolutionary biology with economics. The combined thesis is somewhat elusive, but one might attempt to capture it as follows. Large-scale patterns in sexual behavior—persistent behavioral tendencies and repeated social patterns—are best explained biologically, as ways that the species has found of maximizing its evolutionary fitness. Within the large constraints of biology, on the other hand, individuals, being rational agents (a characteristic that itself is held to derive from evolution), seek to maximize their own satisfactions, computing costs and benefits.

There is no reason in principle why someone who recognizes and stresses the great variety with which societies have constructed sexual categories and norms might not also believe that beneath this variety lie certain "natural" regularities. These regularities might even be invoked to explain why, in each concrete set of circumstances, the specific cultural manifestations take the form they do. Sometimes Posner attempts to integrate his bioeconomic with his historical argument in some such way, as in his attempt to explain ancient Greek homosexuals as of two different sorts: some (the "pathics") being males biologically determined to a preference for the passive role (which, quite confusingly, he simply equates with today's people who prefer a same-sex partner, regardless of what sexual role they take), others (the vast majority) being "opportunistic" homosexuals who prefer (young) male partners simply because access to women is difficult.

Still, even such an attempted reconciliation of the two theses runs into difficulty. For in fact the evidence shows that women, in the role of prostitutes, were widely available in ancient Athens; no can Posner's argument explain the thriving business done by male prostitutes in that same city. Posner's account of the ways in which the changing social position of women influences social mores regarding marriage and related sexual matters is stronger and more interesting—though its interest derives far more from its historical than from its bioeconomic component.

In many other cases, Posner does not

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even try to reconcile his two lines of argument. For example, he asserts that the fact that women frequent prostitutes less often than men shows that women have, by nature, a lower "sex drive" than do men, failing to consider the manifold cultural and emotional factors that play a role in women's distaste for such choices. Again, he asserts that biology determines males to a preference for women with large breasts and hips, although elsewhere in the book he stresses evidence that the sexual attractiveness of bodily shape is a matter of "social construction," the desirable shape varying a great deal from culture to culture. Some of Posner's bioeconomic assertions seem just as false and unsupported by evidence as those in the judicial opinions that he deplores: for example, the assertion that males are more sexually jealous than females—a fact that experience does not appear to bear out—and the assertion that a woman's ideal of an appealing sexual partner is a male who will be likely to protect and care for her offspring. (The plots of many works, from *Medea* to *Casablanca*, might be considered with these two theses in mind.)

And there is a more general problem about the fit between the two projects. The historical project speaks of sexual desire as a phenomenon characterized by a rich and complex intentionality: that is, as fundamentally directed to an object and concerned with the object seen in a certain way. Desire, in that picture, might contain instinctual components, but it is essentially a pull rather than a push, a response to the perception of some value. The biological argument, by contrast, and its economic companion even more clearly, views desire as simply a push, as a force that demands discharge and satisfaction and remains rather constant, whether a suitably evocative object is on the scene or not. It is by making this assumption that Posner can argue, for example, that a male deprived of access to females will choose an available male partner; that a female who, in the absence of a male partner, does not, like a similarly situated male, frequent a prostitute gives evidence thereby of a lower "sex drive." To have sorted out the "drive" component and the intentional component in sexual desire, and to have described some of the complexities of the interactions between the two, would have been a first step toward an adequate theory of human sexuality. In this sense, Posner's book doesn't even take the first step.

Nor is it clear that Posner's explanatory theory, such as it is, is really the alternative to moral and religious theories of sexuality that he believes it to be. His strategy is to demonstrate that if one understands that sexual matters have a non-metaphysical origin, an origin in our animal history, and if one can push this secular explanation far enough, so that it seems to explain what we want to explain at least as well as explanations of sex that invoke divine entities and laws, then we will have put those vestiges of religious moralism at a considerable disadvantage in the American legal process.

But this does not make biology a replacement for morality. As Posner himself is well aware, one may hold that biology has constrained human behavior in certain ways without believing that this goes very far in telling us how we ought to behave toward one another in sexual matters. The fact (if it is a fact) that certain forms of behavior promoted the evolutionary fitness of the species at a certain time in its history says nothing at all about whether intelligent reflective creatures should choose to perpetuate these patterns of action. Posner, as I say, knows this; and he insists, for example, on the fact that polygamy, while functional in certain contexts, is unlikely to promote the equality of women, a goal that many modern societies with good reason (in his view) pursue.

But then it is not clear why his theory

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is a replacement for moral theorizing—except in the sense that any Darwinian explanation tends to undercut modes of explanation and normative discourse that stress the discontinuity between humans and other animals, and that posit otherworldly origins for all that is valuable in human life. To stress the this-worldly and animal nature of sexuality, however, does not go far toward justifying the reductive modes of analysis ("search costs," "transaction costs," and so on) in which Posner takes such pride. For there are many ways of being a this-worldly animal; and one of those ways is to be an animal that is ethical. Such an animal will be likely to need a more complex language than Posner offers.

The largest problem in the book—and, I think, in much of Posner's other writing about secular morality—is that he supposes, in effect, that if God is dead, then everything is indeed permitted; that when religion goes out the door, morality goes out the door, too; that all we have left, if we deny ourselves the appeal to transcendent sources of authority in moral matters, is a situation in which the world is a great market and individuals are simply competing to maximize the satisfaction of their subjective preferences, any one of which is as good as any other. If not heavenly judgment, then hands off on all moral judgment. It is for this reason that Posner can oddly classify Ronald Dworkin's rights-based approach to sexual/legal matters as a species of religious view. He makes the mistake of thinking that humans cannot invent and commit themselves to moral categories on their very own hook, without the other world to tell them so.

This is the sort of error that will be made by someone all too fascinated by religion, and by human dependence on it; by someone who doesn't altogether trust human beings to use their very own wits to say what has value and how much. Posner, secular humanist that he is, should not make such an error. And, to be sure, he doesn't always. His book, far more quirky and fascinating than this summary of its argument makes it seem, contains constantly surprising reminders of its author's complexity and perceptiveness—as when, in a brief paragraph, he distinguishes between two types of erotic love, giving an account of love that cannot be integrated into the central argument, and is the richer for that. And at one point he seems to acknowledge that his own theory is simply a crude and somewhat shocking theory that will, like an "acid bath," peel away "layers of ignorance, ideology, superstition, and prejudice," and "clear the ground for a normative analysis" of a more complete and adequate sort.

How important is the bioeconomic theory for the concrete legal reasoning in the book's third section, where Posner unfolds his normative "libertarian" approach? Fortunately, at least as I see it, not very important. Posner frequently refers back to the bioeconomic theory for a general atmosphere of this-worldliness, hardheadedness, and sanity, but he might as well have invoked any secular moral theory. Indeed, there are some theories—say, Dworkin's rights-based theory—that would have provided a far more adequate philosophical foundation for Posner's libertarian judgments than his own theory does.

Revealingly, in his first reference to the "libertarian" normative theory, he borrows the language of Mill: conduct should not be regulated that does not damage another's "*liberty* or property" (my emphasis). Later, he says in his own voice that conduct will be regulable only on the basis of "economic or other utilitarian considerations." But protection of fundamental rights and liberties has not generally been a strong point of utilitarianism, which usually holds that such moral considerations are merely instrumental to satisfactions, and are to be overridden when the balance of satisfactions goes against them. Still, one might, with Mill (and with contemporary thinkers such as Amartya Sen), defend a general consequentialist conception—a conception in which the right question to ask about an action is whether it promotes the best consequences overall—and yet include the protection of fundamental human rights among the consequences that get promoted. I think that this is what Posner actually does, in many cases; and insofar as he follows Mill (and Sen) in this way, he is a lot closer to Dworkin's view of legal reasoning than his own statements suggest.

Posner's general strategy in this section of the book is to demand that we ask about social costs and benefits calmly and comprehensively, prejudice and disgust aside, using all the information available to us about the practices concerning which we are judging. Proceeding in this way, he arrives at results that will surprise those who are accustomed to making simple distinctions between "left" and "right," and who have long since decided that Posner, in virtue of his pro-market stances, must be a "right-wing" thinker. Describing his conclusions will not do justice to his arguments, but the conclusions are remarkable in their own right.

Marriage. On the whole Posner favors the gradual substitution of a secular form of contractual cohabitation (currently available in Scandinavia) for the institution of marriage as it is presently understood. Short of this, he would wish (*a*) to recognize non-marital cohabitation by some form of legal contract guaranteeing certain rights and benefits, and (*b*) to overhaul the system of alimony in order to provide compensatory benefits, in the case of divorce, for women who have sacrificed career opportunities to assist a spouse. He tends to favor allowing homosexuals to marry, although he would really like to solve this problem by "chucking the whole institution of marriage in favor of an explicitly contractual approach that would make the current realities of marriage transparent." Polygamy, he tentatively holds, should continue to be illegal, since it remains connected with hierarchy and the unequal social position of women. But women who have children outside of a recognized marriage should be protected somehow.

Homosexuality. The disgust that many Americans feel toward homosexuals is based on a combination of ignorance and machismo. (The only popular stereotype on this question that Posner finds reliable, on the basis of his cross-cultural study, is that homosexuals have a higher than average probability of having an artistic career, and "it is not the worst fate in the world to be condemned to a career in the arts.") Sodomy laws should be repealed, even if they are not enforced, since they tend to provide a basis for other exclusions—for example, from professions such as that of the judiciary, in which we would be reluctant to see an admitted lawbreaker. He is highly critical of the opinions in *Bowers* for "ignoring the ideological roots" of the Georgia sodomy law, for "lack of knowledge about this history and character of the regulation of sexuality," and, above all, for "profound lack of empathy for the situation of the male homosexual in America." And he supports the idea of a general constitutional right of sexual autonomy, which would cover this case along with many others. He also suggests that homosexuals should count as a suspect class for the purposes of the equal protection clause, and that, even given the *Bowers* result, this avenue of argument might possibly still be used by courts to rule in their favor.

As for the issue of homosexuals in the military, Posner provides a devastating criticism of the arguments most often used to support their exclusion: the security risk argument, the argument that gays are unstable, the sexual harassment argument. The one argument that he takes seriously is the view that the presence of gay men (he doesn't find this

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problem in the case of women) may well create serious morale problems, given the prevalence and the violence of male homophobia in America (by contrast to other countries, such as the Netherlands, which have unproblematically integrated gays into the services). Posner fears that homophobia is so deep in the self-definition of many American males that the danger of violence against gays is really rather great, and greater than in the parallel case of racial integration. Yet he thinks that the risk should be run, "for it is terrible to tell people they are unfit to serve their country, unless they really are unfit, which is not the case here." He favors a gradual policy of integration, beginning by keeping in the services gays who are already there and "come out," gradually accepting new recruits.

Privacy and the Constitution. Posner holds that the privacy cases involving contraception and abortion were, in general, correctly decided, although he does not approve of all the reasoning in the opinions. He thinks that in the end no compelling basis in the Constitution exists for the recognition of a general right to sexual autonomy, but that the courts should plug this gap and recognize one anyhow:

> A constitution that did not invalidate so offensive, oppressive, probably undemocratic, and sectarian a law [viz., the anticontraception law at issue in *Griswold* v. *Connecticut*] would stand revealed as containing major gaps. Maybe that is the nature of our, as perhaps of any, written Constitution; but yet, perhaps the courts are authorized to plug at least the more glaring gaps. Does anyone really believe, in his heart of hearts, that the Constitution should be interpreted so literally as to authorize every conceivable law that would not violate a specific constitutional clause? This would mean that a state could require everyone to marry, or to have sexual intercourse at least once a month.... Yet we do find it reassuring to think that the courts stand between us and legislative tyranny even if a particular form of tyranny was not foreseen and expressly forbidden by the framers of the Constitution.

Pornography. In a discussion closely linked to Posner's opinion in the Kitty Kat Lounge case but ranging more widely, since here he is not constrained by previous Supreme Court pronouncements on obscenity, Posner holds that the only pornography that should be legally restricted is pornography that uses child models or inflicts damage on adult models. (His ruling in the case of *Robyn Douglass* v. *Hustler Magazine*, however, also shows that he is willing to support civil damage actions against such publications when photographs are used without consent.) His conclusion here is tentative; and yet, having argued that expressive artistic representations (for example, Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs) must be protected, he confesses that he can find no evident differences—with respect to the issues of violence and misogyny that are of most concern to feminists—between these "arty" works and the more popular pornographic forms.

Citing the arguments of the feminist historian of religion Margaret Miles concerning the patriarchal and misogynistic dimensions of much of classical art, Posner concludes that "if a *Playboy* pinup belongs to the same genre as a Renaissance nude, then since the latter is plainly protected by the First Amendment, so must the former be." In the *Kitty Kat* opinion, he notes that the category of "established art," sometimes invoked to try to make this distinction, would have excluded from protection Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, and much else besides. And that is not his only worry. He plainly wants the dancers of the Kitty Kat Lounge to be free to express themselves in their own low-art way, and doesn't see why the protection of the First Amendment should be extended only to those who meet with the approval of highbrow tastes. Here Posner is openly at odds with many feminists. Though some of their arguments are powerful, and perhaps deserving of more scrutiny than Posner gives them, I am in sympathy with his conclusions.

Posner, plainly, is a complex character, difficult to pin down. One might do worse than to think of him as the George Bernard Shaw of American law. Like Shaw, he combines a passion for exposing humbug and pseudo-profundity with an odd but genuine sort of social compassion, a delight in shocking the self-righteous with a love of human diversity and freedom—and all of this, one must add, with a good deal of Shaw's inability to get inside the messier human emotions, with his tendency to think of emotion itself as a peculiar sort of religious dogma. Posner's bioeconomic theory is no better than Don Juan's theory of "the Life Force" (which it strongly resembles) as an explanation of the complexities of human sexuality. But as with Shaw, I think, so with Posner: long after the deeply flawed theories have been forgotten, we will remember, and profit by, the wit and the courage of his attacks on bigotry, folly, and cruelty.

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM is the author most recently of *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press).

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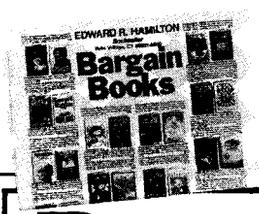

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America at Sea

BY MARK EDMUNDSON

Outerbridge Reach by Robert Stone

(Ticknor and Fields, 409 pp., $21.95)

Near the beginning of *Children of Light*, Robert Stone's fourth novel, which appeared in 1986, Gordon Walker sets out south from Los Angeles along the coastal road heading for Mexico and a disaster that he, through no particular virtue, manages to survive. Walker slows down to stop in a seedy little American town along the way: "At right angles to the coast road, garnished with a rank of rat-infested royal palms, ran the lineup of tackle stores, taco stands, and murky cocktail lounges that was the beach's principal thoroughfare."

The detail about the rats is pure Robert Stone. In the harsh vision of his first four novels, claims to nobility or high-mindedness (much less to royalty) are inevitably revealed as corrupt or corruptible. Stone's vision, his comprehensive sense of how brutally the world works, is so insistent that it penetrates his novels at every level. Sweet blossoms conceal cancerous defects; religious shrines are sites for human despoilment; a hotel called the Paradise becomes the nerve center for a vile counterrevolution; there are rats in the royal palms.

Stone's central figures are often idealists who succumb, with surprisingly little resistance, to some form of moral blight. His first protagonist, Rheinhardt in *A Hall of Mirrors* (1968), was a gifted musician: the scene of his Juilliard audition is one of the most beautiful and generous things Stone has written. Rheinhardt ends up as a disk jockey for a rabid right-wing station in New Orleans during the early days of the civil rights movement. The reactionary homiletics, of which he doesn't believe a word, pour out like water. "Where did you learn to do that? he enquired of himself in his new Rheinhardt voice." Then the reply: "O, but it's nothing really. It's just a routine. I have a lot of routines and that's just one of them."

Why does Rheinhardt's celestial moment at Juilliard degenerate into the crazy radio routines? One of the novel's implicit answers is that finer passions disintegrate when there is nothing—no religious principles, no cultural or political forms, no varieties of personal connection—to which one can entrust them. Uncorroborated and unsupported, what's best in people turns vile. And the more grace that is given, the lower we sink: witness the degeneration of Rheinhardt's exquisite musical powers into an exquisitely lacerating drunken meanness. Stone's indictment in his first novel is aimed at an America that doesn't provide a home for the renovating energies that it nonetheless succeeds in stimulating.

Hicks, one of the two protagonists of Stone's *Dog Soldiers* (1974), is a member of the merchant marines who has just finished a hitch in Vietnam. He's also a student of Nietzsche ("what does not kill me makes me stronger") and a practitioner of Zen and t'ai chi. Finding no outlet for his higher passions, he becomes a heroin smuggler and dies in a lost and unworthy cause. Hicks gets hooked (addiction is rife in the book) to a view of himself as a questing anti-hero, and he dies sustaining it. For Stone, however, it is only an initial nobility that makes such addiction possible. In Hicks's fall, Stone means us to see an image of the degeneration of America as it pitched itself deeper and deeper into the Vietnam War. Unable to be Asia's heroic rescuer, we became, with equal intensity, its despoiler.

Stone's novels have tended to head south. Gordon Walker goes to Mexico, Hicks flees far into Southern California to escape his pursuers, and Frank Holliwell, the main figure in *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981), makes his way to Central America, where he is duped into revolutionary intrigues that are way beyond his stunted and endemically American powers of understanding. Holliwell is a well-intentioned, irresolute academic with some CIA connections in his background. A sentimental boozer, he's a much softer man than Rheinhardt or Hicks. In many ways Holliwell resembles Converse of *Dog Soldiers*, a character who, in a moment of devastating fear, comes to know himself as a quivering congestion of flesh insulting to the earth, a "funny little fucker."

But Holliwell, with his gelatinous liberal goodwill, sows more destruction than either Hicks or Rheinhardt. He ends up selling out the woman he believes himself to love, the brilliantly rendered Sister Justin, and giving aid to the reactionary party in the revolution, the party of the Paradise Hotel. Holliwell is, I think, Stone's most impressively achieved character. Though his ineptitude is obvious, one is often forced to admit that it would be very hard in his situation to act differently than he does. Moreover, his narrow fumblings in Central America serve to illuminate America's larger failing there and elsewhere, failings that are owed to the American inclination to believe that whatever is in our own interest must also be virtuous. *A Flag for Sunrise* is more than a superb adventure novel and a shrewd character study. As an account of America's spiritual blindness in the world at large, the novel may be unsurpassed.

In one sense Stone is an allegorist. All of his novels venture into some heart of darkness, be it Mexico or the New Orleans ghetto. All feature erotic triangles (always two men and a woman). All tell the story of innocence destroyed or destroying. Stone tends, somewhat in the manner of Saul Bellow, to recycle his characters: Gordon Walker recalls Rheinhardt; Holliwell resembles not only Converse but Rainey from *A Hall of Mirrors*. But the obsessive patternings in Stone's novels don't make the work feel schematic or predictable.

A good deal of Stone's prowess lies in his ability to sustain a tension between his allegorical designs and the moment-to-moment texture of his writing. *Dog Soldiers* and *A Flag for Sunrise* are written one barbed sentence at a time, often in an arrestingly ironic compound of elegant syntax and American low-life diction. The dialogue is superb. Not only is Stone's inner ear for American speech unerring, but he always proceeds with the playwright's conviction that good dialogue is, if only obliquely, antagonistic. Stone's characters speak because they want to get something done, usually to their interlocutors. As an observer, Stone is also remarkable: he knows just the detail that will work to make you conjure up everything else that's in the room. And this skill contributes to Stone's extraordinary success in pacing; he writes at a velocity perfectly attuned to readers whose powers of response have been accelerated by a lifetime of moviegoing. So when Stone is working at his best, he provides a plausible and engaging foreground that refines the allegory. His obsessions haunt his novels subtly, which is an uncommon achievement;

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they surround everything with a faintly ominous aura.

Outerbridge Reach—the title itself suggests that the writer is attempting to stretch his powers—has the vast ambition that one has come to associate with Stone. He has set out again to write America's biography, this time to show how it is with us in the graceless year of 1992. Stone has embarked on a sea story, a large enough subject for an American writer, who must operate in the wake of Melville and Hemingway. The new novel is full of brilliant writing, and it is populated by arresting, swiftly rendered characters. Stone's knack for evoking a place (especially New York City) is sharper than ever. And the novel has a beautiful classic design, moving adroitly from sea to land. *Outerbridge Reach* is, among other things, a splendid device, poised and graceful as a gyroscope, and its formal beauty serves as an artful contrast to its characters' inability to find significant form anywhere in life.

At the center of the novel is Owen Browne, an Annapolis graduate, class of 1968, who has served in Vietnam and been one of the country's anointed ones, a trained heir to the last third of the American Century. But the American Century didn't unfold according to plan: humiliated in Vietnam, the nation found itself with little pressing need for men like Browne. In many ways Browne is a character out of Hemingway: brave, clear-minded, intense in his loyalties, with no particular gift for appraising the world, much less himself, ironically. "Irony," Stone has said in one of the few unironic lines he has allowed into print, "is my friend and brother." A Stone character who lacks that allegiance is not likely to fare well.

At the opening of the book Browne is in his early 40s and is working as marketing director for Altan Marine, a yacht brokerage in Connecticut. He and his wife, Anne, vote Republican, read *The American Spectator*, send their daughter to school with the nuns, and nurse a grudge against their generation for not supporting the war in Vietnam. Weary of his work and weary of his home life, Browne is beginning to believe that he has lost the main chance: nothing noble (nothing, that is, that Hemingway might have cared to chronicle) will come of him. Browne is shallow enough not to recognize that he is going through something of a standard midlife crisis, but he is brave enough to translate his unfocused desperation into something more than a down payment on a Porsche or a fling with a 19-year-old.

When Matty Hylan, the owner of Altan's parent company, disappears on the eve of an around-the-world solo boat race, Browne hastily volunteers to take his place. The physical challenge is large: Browne is an experienced, but not an expert, sailor. Stone's main interest, though, is in the voyage of Browne's spirit. Can this man, who embodies some share of what conventional America calls virtue, handle the rigors of isolation on the sea? Is there a possibility for heroism in America's middle class? (There is, in Browne, something of a younger George Bush—capable, confident, unself-questioning—just as Holliwell, in his jejune benevolence, obliquely suggested Jimmy Carter.)

Once again Stone is putting America on trial. The key witness is Ron Strickland, a maker of documentary films who has been contracted by the Hylan Corporation to record Matty Hylan's triumphal circumnavigation and who stays on, after the corporate boy-wonder absconds, to film Browne's story. Strickland is an aging hipster in the Rheinhardt/Gordon Walker mode, though he's much more capable and productive than either of them. In Strickland's case, corruption and purity have merged to produce a repugnantly charismatic amalgam. The purity is manifest in Strickland's drive to tell something as close as possible to the truth in his documentaries—and his willingness to pay for it. Once in Vietnam a group of tunnel rats who didn't like Strickland's style tied him overnight in an enemy tunnel. "'But I take comfort,'" Strickland says. "'I was doing my job. Follow truth too close by the heels, it kicks you in the teeth. Famous saying.'"

But it's in Strickland's idea of truth that his limitations lie. He is an instinctive proponent of the view that the worst truth about some person or thing is the most central truth. "'Christ,'" says Strickland's assistant Hersey, as he watches Central American footage in which an American diplomat tries to explain himself, "'you really open them up.'" "'I get them to spread,' Strickland said. 'That I do.'" Strickland is pivotal to an understanding of this book not only because his perceptions are more intense and provocative than the other characters', but also because he shares more with Robert Stone than his initials. The two are drawn to similar subject matter: Strickland's film on Vietnam, *L. Z. Bravo*, brings *Dog Soldiers* to mind, just as his work in progress on Central America recalls *A Flag for Sunrise*. Strickland also shares some biographical data with Stone. Both the character and his creator grew up as only children in intense communion with itinerant, educated, possibly deranged mothers, and both have strong associations with New York.

Surely Stone doesn't mean us to draw a correspondence between Strickland's character and his own. Strickland is a consistently unethical man: selfish, manipulative, cruel. What's at stake in the resemblance is the stature of Stone's own work, throughout his career, but chiefly here, in *Outerbridge Reach*. Is this book, like Strickland's films, a product of a reductive fallacy? Does it ungenerously reduce its characters to their most pitiable or repugnant qualities, and thereby give its audience a facile sense of superiority? Such charges have been made against Stone in the past.

By putting Strickland in the novel, by showing the limits of his character and suggesting the limits of his art, Stone, it seems to me, is trying to pass beyond whatever there is in himself that would be satisfied with Strickland's kind of simplifications. To what degree, then, is the novelistic sensibility that organizes our view of the Brownes different from the sensibility of the filmmaker who is busy creating what will inevitably be a lacerating vision of them and their world? At times Stone and Strickland seem to merge, as in this passage in which Strickland takes in the scene at a Manhattan club where the entertainment is being provided by a band called Low Density Babylon:

> Low Density Babylon ground on; the dancers splayed their hands and boogied. It was a weeknight and a weeknight crowd had turned out: a few blacks who could dance, a few of Hersey's fellow students, a contingent of English media scum. The English imagined themselves and their schemes invisible and danced with abandon, looking goatish and soiled. Strickland had observed that they were always the best dancers in the place. Lights played on their toothy faces.

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The passage is essential Strickland: witty, pungent, worldly, unpleasant, giving no quarter. But it's also vintage Stone. Note the characteristic skill with which he balances precise observation with allegorical intimations. There's a background whisper of Babylonian corruption, Poe's dancing maskers, fire and plague—but it's conveyed subtly, with no damage done to the realistic texture of the book. The word "soiled" is a favorite of Stone's; it occurs a number of times in the novel, always connoting inevitable human corruption, paradise not so much lost as befouled.

You can easily conceive the results when Strickland, fresh from making the powers in Central America spread, sets to work on Owen Browne. One of Strickland's most useful attributes is a stutter that gets men like Browne thinking that he's an inept weakling to whom they can, in brave language, explain life's meanings:

> Idea-wise, Strickland found that Browne had a few nuggets for the camera:
>
> "I think most of us spend our lives without ever having to find out what we're made of. Our lives are soft in this country. In the present day a man can live his whole life and never test his true resources."
>
> And also: "The sea is the bottom line. Out there you have the elementals. You have day and night. You have ocean and sky. Your boat and yourself. It's a situation of ultimate self-reliance."
>
> "The great American virtue," Strickland said. He was not averse to helping out.

Strickland mocks Browne unequivocally, though Browne is a touch too dense to pick up on it. Stone, however, reserves a higher regard for physical courage, even when it comes unaccompanied by developed powers of self-appraisal. He seems to concur with Browne's lines about our lives being too soft and about our failure to seek significant challenges. The sentiment is evident in his treatment of Browne, and it was underlined in a recent article in *The New York Times* in which Stone castigated Americans for having "made a virtue of mediocrity," and went to the length of offering mobsters some ambivalent praise for taking risks and living by a code. "Self-interest," he said at the close of the piece, "can take us only so far. At a certain point, human nature rejects it as an end, requiring something higher and finer." Owen Browne would agree.

But Browne isn't up to the quest he takes on. His self-reliance proves about as effective at sea as the other deluded variants on the Emersonian virtue do in Stone's visions of Vietnam and Central America. It's not long into the race before Browne, cast back on his own spiritual resources, finds himself close to bankrupt. He has never developed the kind of inner life that would arise from playing principles off against measured amounts of skepticism, measured doses of irony. For Browne, to disbelieve a little is to disbelieve all; and on the ocean, without society's assurances, a little disbelief is easy.

Unable to converse fruitfully with himself, Browne is talked to by others. He attends to the voice of his father who has been dead for many years, to the voices of evangelists coming over his ship radio, and then, through the evangelists, to something he dimly feels is the voice of an alien, disapproving God. Self-reliance undone, Browne finds authorities to fill the empty inward space. As Browne's identity dissolves, Stone's prose becomes sparer, toward the end verging on a blank anonymity. Here Browne, in a deserted house on an empty island, reflecting on his inadequacies and on his willingness to cheat in order to win the race, touches on despair:

> On this ocean, Browne thought, goodbye to almanacs and hope in Stella Maris and the small rain down. This is a game beyond me. A diver, he felt as though he were breathing from an empty tank. His windpipe contracted in its greed for the thin stream. His gasps went unrewarded. He knelt down on the floor of the house. He felt the suspension of hope and wished for it back. He regretted lying.

The authorial voice is detached, but it is not without elegiacal intimations, not without some respect for Browne.

Left home while Browne goes off to the race is his wife, who also undergoes something of a fall. Like Owen, she looks back to the Vietnam War as the most intense, and even the happiest, part of her life: "She remembered the happiness of youth and the feeling of fuck the world, the proud acceptance of honor, duty, and risk. In spite of everything they had proved life against their pulses then, beat by beat." Now Anne is conservative, respectable, and reined in. At the start of the book, she's writing for a yachting magazine, rendering airbrushed versions of the kind of voyage that will ruin her husband.

With Owen gone, Anne descends first into liquor. Stone is an American laureate of alcohol. No one is better at portraying the subtle, pleasing enhancements of consciousness, and the sudden self-lacerations, to which liquor soothes the way. Here Anne, not without sympathy from Stone, steps gingerly off the wagon:

> Scotch from a decanter. Sipping hers, Anne savored the tawny glow of the lamps and the bright apartment and the heavy-browed elegance of the unhappy man across the room from her. Drinking it, she soon missed her clear head and regretted the wasted days of self-denial. In spite of that, the drink made her feel better. Owen, she thought, what have you left me to?

To Strickland, among other things: it is not long before Anne descends into an affair with the filmmaker. She is drawn to

Our Boys: The Eighth Pillar

We know what we're doing now. Believe me:
two hundred years, a few honorable wars,
a few less so, and something to expect, fulfilling
the prophecy we celebrate each early July—
one of the national pastimes, the energy billed to
lighting up our American Dream. It's drama
for sure. That much we know, what we *have* learned.

Our boys pitch tents where the sun looses everything
we might mistake for something romantic, dreams
of the Legion, memories of Lawrence and his strong cast.
They've pitched tents only a few years from the campsites
where at sunrise they emerged with their decent fathers
and fishing poles, walked to the stream bank to fire
their colorful lures, weapons of their outing,

into the trout infested water, pulling them back
to shore, and later, in good spirits, eating their kill.
But our boys are sometimes too young to buy a weak drink.
Sometimes our boys are too young to cast
a vote in the direction of their own destinies. Our boys
pitch tents where the sun's no emblem, where the stars
don't carry cards and after the shot they don't get up.

DANIEL HALPERN

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Strickland out of hopes for more life, as a way of toppling her boredom. Strickland comes after Anne, a woman he calls "a big creamy bitch," at least in part to tear down her high-toned self-image. He wants her to understand that she's not so unlike Pamela, the prostitute who is Strickland's intermittent sidekick. ("She looked capable of anything," Strickland thinks observing Pamela, "at the point of becoming either the perpetrator of a major felony or the victim of one.") Strickland's appetite for the "truth" acts up here: he takes it as a personal affront when he encounters anyone who doesn't know the worst about himself or herself, and where possible he offers tutelage.

Soon he has Anne broken down. She crops her hair close to her head ("for disgrace," she says, more truly than she's aware) and takes to wearing tight silk out of deference to Strickland's tastes. ("Silk. Skin. Something visual. So we can see where everything is.") Anne's visual transformation, I assume, is the erotic equivalent of Owen's own surrender of himself and willingness to cheat. What the ocean does to Owen, Strickland does to Anne. In neither case does it take long. In neither case is the resistance offered anything to marvel at.

And it is the relative ease with which Owen and Anne come apart that makes the book something less than tragic. Though Stone sometimes pulls back and makes a nasty pronouncement about the Brownes, in general he takes pains to inhabit them as sympathetically as possible; in this regard he is distinct from Strickland, who will surely take every opportunity, small and great, to humiliate Anne and Owen in his film. Still, by choosing the Brownes, and particularly Owen, to represent the middle class in a book that aims to be an allegory of American life now, Stone is, I think, emulating Strickland with a reduction of his own.

For Stone could have picked a smarter and hipper character to fill Browne's place. By creating a character with Browne's particular defects, Stone has made his own conclusions about the general ineptitude of the comfortable classes seem a little rigged, a little too easy to achieve. (In *A Flag for Sunrise*, by contrast, Stone came up with Holliwell, a figure of genuine, if flawed, feeling and intelligence, who succeeds in implicating the reader in ways that Browne cannot.) By using Browne, Stone barred his novel from reaching an authentically tragic dimension, prevented it from rising far above the limits of Strickland's art. Moment to moment, *Outerbridge Reach* surpasses the filmmaker in subtlety and tact, but in its overall design, it is the work of someone who is satisfied with setting up a large target and then blowing it away.

MARK EDMUNDSON teaches English at the University of Virginia and is the editor of *The Academy Writes Back*, forthcoming from Viking.

TRB *continued from page 4*

ered some kind of defect that he has wanted to be president all his life. Children used to be taught that America is a great country because any child can grow up to be president. From now on children had better be forewarned, when handed this patriotic chestnut, that actually *wanting* to be president is an unsuitable ambition for children.

Or possibly for adults as well. That is the premise of Ross Perot's "beg me" campaign. This is just the logical extension of Jerry Brown's stance—Bill Clinton's, too, in one of his phonier strategies—as an outsider. The implication is that traditional political arrangements, whereby people establish their qualifications for higher office by successfully running for and serving in lower office—and therefore dedicate a good part of their lives to the pursuit of politics—cannot produce a suitable president. If true, it's a remarkable indictment of our democratic system (or maybe of democracy itself).

I don't think it is true. But if Clinton is derailed because of the inevitable compromises and blemishes on his twelve-year record as governor of Arkansas, we will certainly have reached a point where prior public office is, at best, a disadvantage in seeking the presidency (unless, like George Bush's, your prior jobs were largely ceremonial or secret). By most assessments, Clinton was a pretty good governor of a very poor state. Surely that ought to be a plus in his account.

Of the three remaining serious presidential contenders—Bush, Brown, and Clinton—it is the so-called "robo-candidate," Clinton, who has given the most evidence of a genuine heart beating under the circuit boards. Read, in the current (April 6) *Time* magazine, excerpts from a letter Clinton wrote to a classmate at the time of his draft troubles. I'm not sure these lines absolve Clinton on the draft issue, as his friend *Time* editor Strobe Talbott seems to think. But they reveal in Clinton a level of moral reflectiveness George Bush has never achieved, on available evidence.

Nor can you imagine Bush (or Brown) displaying the combined human anger and human compassion of Clinton in his televised outburst against that AIDS activist in New York. Now, Clinton's a very smart guy, and I wouldn't absolutely put it past him to have faked this famous mad scene. But a politician who could fake humanity that skillfully would be just about as good as a real human being.

In other words, he'll do. So far.

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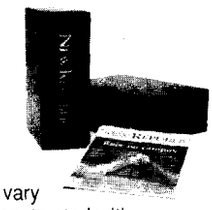

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Gulf wars

ON TWO SEPARATE OCCASIONS RECently, when I asked officials of the Bush re-election campaign about their themes for the future, I got the surprising answer: "Go see *Grand Canyon*. It's the best thing around on what's wrong with this country and what we've got to do to fix it." So, I went, twice. I liked the movie, too, though for different reasons than the Bushies did: *Grand Canyon* takes a half step toward interjecting the concept of religious faith into a movie, which Hollywood seems terrified of doing. I understand why the Bush people liked the movie, but I think that Bill Clinton actually has better answers to the problems posed than Bush does. In New York, however, Clinton seems about to become a victim of the savage cynicism depicted in the film.

IN THE MOVIE, STEVE MARTIN, playing a sleazebag producer, uses the Grand Canyon as a metaphor for the gulf that separates upscale white America from the slums—an abyss from which pours "a rage that will engulf us all unless somebody does something about it." Half the movie is about the gulf, the rage, and the violence that results, and half is about the efforts of decent people to do something about it. The hero is a lawyer named Mack, played by Kevin Kline, who takes a *Bonfire of the Vanities*-style detour after an L.A. Lakers game and nearly gets killed by a band of black thugs—until he's saved by a courageous black tow truck operator, Simon, played by Danny Glover. Simon has a sister whose son is involved with the Crips or the Bloods and whose house is riddled with automatic weapons fire in an attempted gang wipeout. When Simon asks his nephew if he's going to keep gang-banging until he's 25, the kid replies, "Shit, I'm never gonna live to be 25." The Martin character gets shot for his watch. A police helicopter is constantly overhead, looking for trouble.

WHAT MOVES PEOPLE AT THE Bush campaign, according to one of them, are the observation by Glover that "the world is not supposed to work like this.... Everything's supposed to be different from what it is" and the declaration by Mack's wife, Claire, played by Mary McDonnell, that "babies are left on the street, people are living in boxes, they will shoot you for your watch ... the world is going nuts and we're getting used to it!" What the good people in this movie do, and what the Bush campaign wants Americans to do, is Make A Difference. Mack befriends Simon, finds his sister a decent apartment removed from the gang wars, and introduces him to the love of his life. Claire, finding an abandoned Hispanic baby, takes steps to adopt it. At the end of the movie, practically the entire cast assembles at the Grand Canyon, gazing in awe at its vast majesty.

IT'S EASY TO BE derisive about *Grand Canyon*. The saccharine level is very high. Good intentions are always rewarded. No one intervening in the life of another ever makes a catastrophic mistake. Even when evil triumphs (as in the Martin character) the consequences are not very great. What's more, writer-director Lawrence Kasdan merely tiptoes up to the subject of religion, but finds it too much to handle frontally. It oughtn't be that difficult for him or for others in Hollywood to portray. People in the audiences *believe*. Polls consistently show that between 70 percent and 90 percent of all Americans consider themselves religious, feel "close to God," and pray often. No other topic, no matter how personal, embarrassing, or perverse (witness *Silence of the Lambs*), is out of bounds for Hollywood, but religious faith somehow is taboo.

KASDAN BELIEVES IN ANGELS—people who unaccountably come along and rescue others. He believes in "fate," and "luck," and "miracles." Claire tells Mack she's going to adopt the baby because she was "meant to" find it. Kasdan simply can't bring himself to say that God meant it, or that God is the author of the moral system that ordains that people aren't supposed to be brutal to each other and aren't supposed to get used to homeless people living in boxes. Kasdan has toyed with religion in films before. He helped write some of the Star Wars scripts, in which the universe is controlled by a "Force" with a good side at war with a dark side. In *Grand Canyon*, when it comes to actually confronting the issue of a deity, Kasdan goes Hollywood. He smirks, having Martin undergo a conversion experience, complete with high-falutin language, that's patently phony and is soon overtaken by narcissism and avarice. Still, for Hollywood, I suppose, half steps are better than nothing.

I AM ALSO IN HALF-AGREEMENT with the politics of *Grand Canyon*. Its message is the same as that of President Bush's Thousand Points of Light program: when people go out of their way to help other people, it can make a profound difference. They do, right now—when neighbors organize against drug dealers, when grandmothers take in AIDS babies, when business tycoons adopt whole classes of schoolchildren and guarantee them a college education. If millions of people did such things this *would* be a better country. Unfortunately, most people do not. They are too busy with their own lives. That's why George Bush and his people are wrong in thinking that Grand Canyonism is enough. It obviously isn't. Befriending one man or adopting one baby does not change the system that leads to kids' not expecting to live to 25. This takes, besides goodwill, political action, the use of government power. For most of four years, the Bush administration has had no domestic program. Suddenly, now that 77 percent of the population thinks the country is on "the wrong track," the Bushies are hastily inventing an agenda of "change." On the other hand, Bill Clinton has been advocating programs of change for several years, involving *both* personal responsibility and government action—training and child care for welfare recipients, for instance, as well as a requirement that they get an education and go to work.

BUT BEFORE CLINTON GETS TO try repairing America's ripped social fabric, he may be a casualty of the pathological cynicism *Grand Canyon* depicts. New York City is a huge, festering wound, with social canyons as deep as any in America. Instead of debating how to cure them, though, the media and political nihilist Jerry Brown are savaging the Clinton candidacy. The press is fixing on Clinton's personal life, drowning out his program and next to ignoring contradictions in the record of Brown, who has been on almost every side of every issu over time, and now is claiming to be an outsider while pandering shamelessly to organized labor—and is getting away with it. Kasdan hasn't pegged L.A. as well as Tom Wolfe did New York, but the messages are the same, and are correct: It isn't supposed to be this way, but America *is* going nuts, and we're getting used to it.

MORTON KONDRACKE

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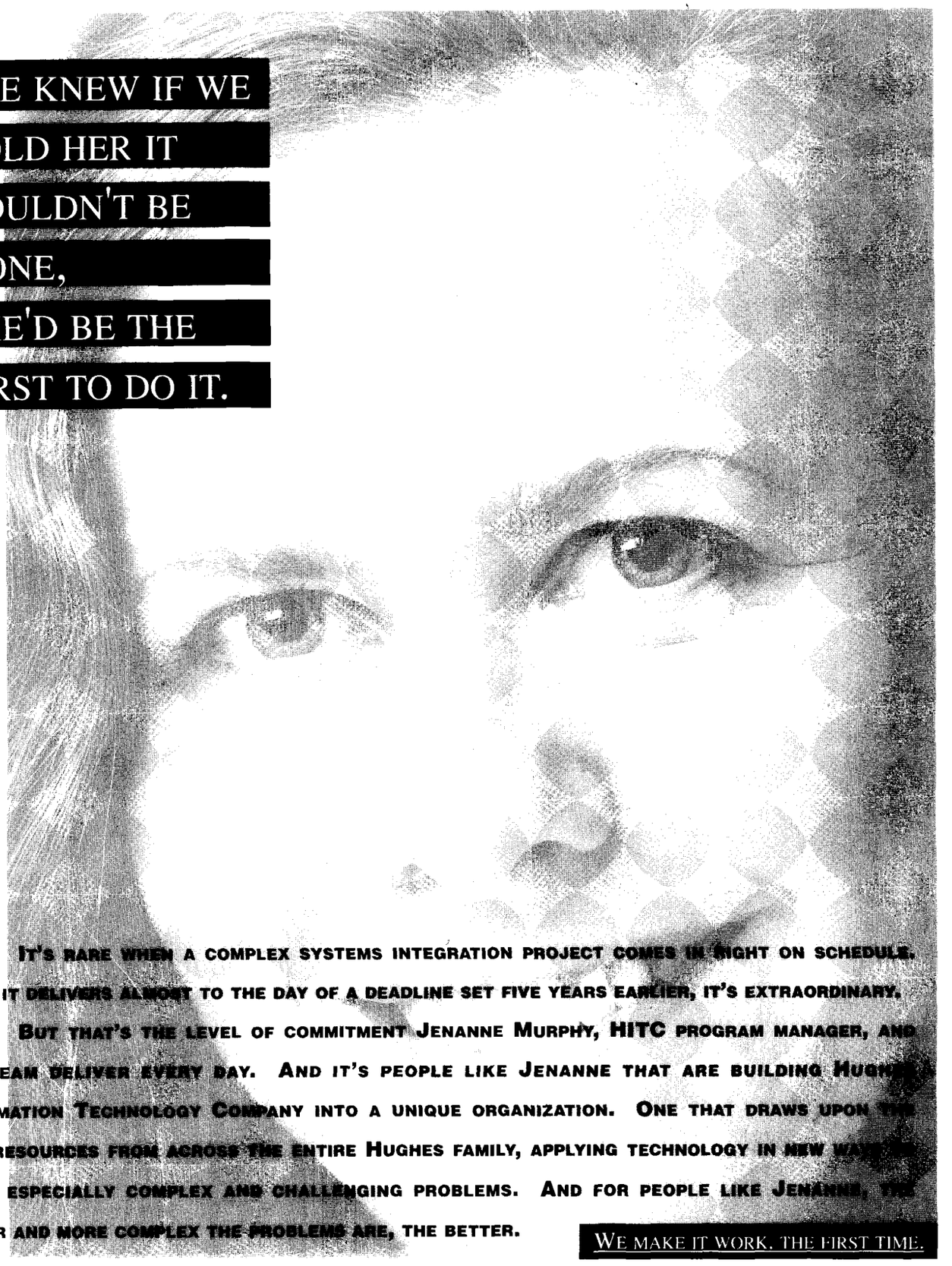

WE KNEW IF WE TOLD HER IT COULDN'T BE DONE, SHE'D BE THE FIRST TO DO IT.

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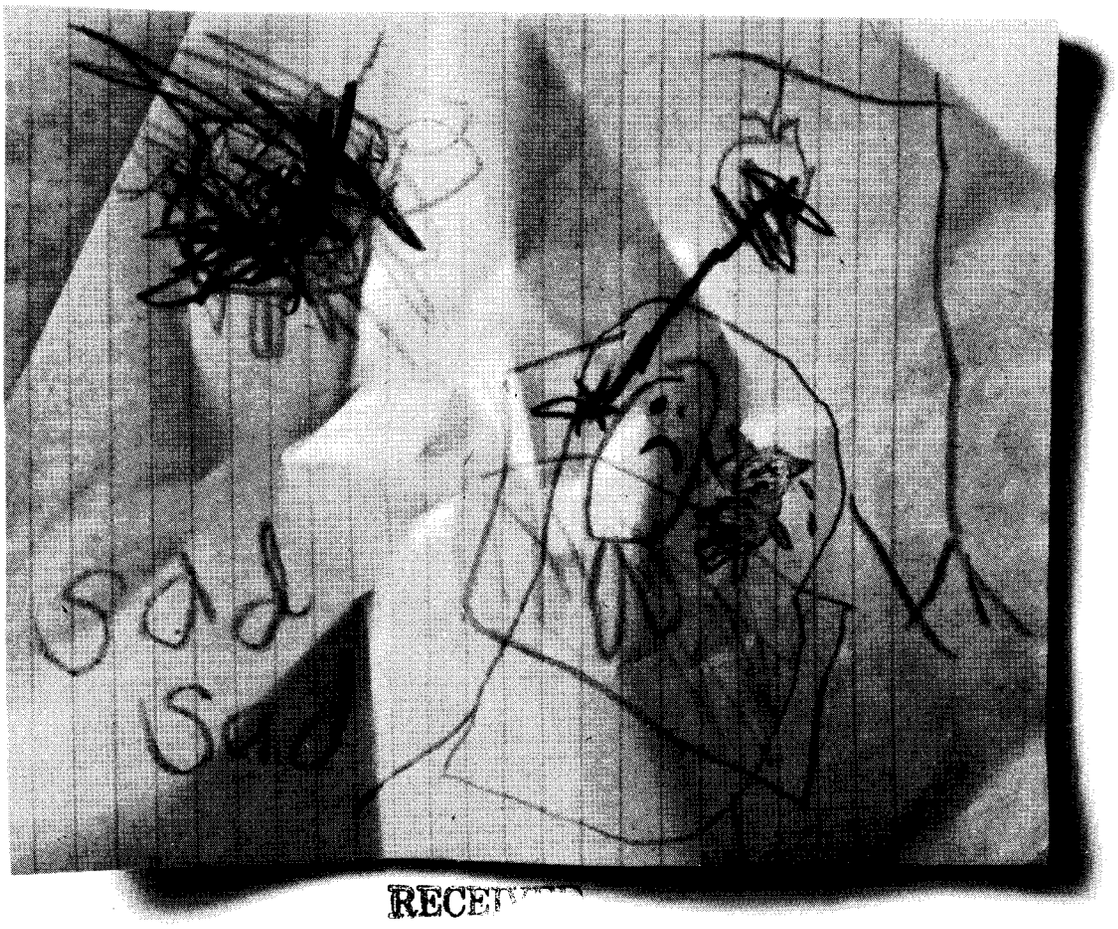

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